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WET CLAY

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WET CLAY

BY

SEUMAS O'KELLY

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WET CLAY.

For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watched the Potter thumping his wet Clay,
And with its all obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd—"Gently, Brother, gently, pray."
—*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.*

CHAPTER I.

BY THE LAKE SHORE.

I.

Brendan Nilan ranged a languid eye over the scene. The fields held that vivid freshness which speaks of the waking year. Scattered belts of trees were beginning to show faint on their naked limbs the promise of summer garments. A woodland nearer to hand gave a deeper note to the landscape. Beyond it rose a range of hills, slope after slope looking as if they were making an eternal obeisance to the majesty of a mountain which hung in the distance in a regal haze.

Strips of yellow winding roads with slow carts driving along them, fields mapped out by a network of loose stone walls, the shapes of beasts moving aimlessly in pastures, little streaks of smoke rising from the chimneys of isolated thatched houses, met his eye, giving an impression of a meagre life, of a land whose pulse beat had gone down.

He turned away from a contemplation of this sweep of hilly country. He was quite near to a lake. The water at his feet washed the shore in a slow rhythm. The air that came from it was sharp in its freshness. Wisps of foam breasted the waves in irregular thin lines out where the water was active. Some distance away there was a little island, fringed with yellow rushes that reached back to the shore.

The little island was covered with brushwood, some fir trees rising up out of the riot, throwing a quivering reflection of their branches in the water, as conventional looking in their distinctness as a well done photograph. On the opposite shore of the lake, some mile and a half across, was a country town—a pile of confused buildings, a stack of chimneys, gables suggesting themselves at all angles, some spires raising their crosses to the sky.

Beyond the occasional leap of a fish in the water, the cries of some wrangling waterfowl hidden in the rushes, the sudden beating of the wings of flocks of plover and gulls passing overhead, the cry from a beast in the fields, no sound broke the silence of the place.

"They call it the Grey Lake," Brendan Nilan said. He was conscious of a harmony in the things he saw around him. They were welcome after his sickness on the ocean voyage. He lay back on the sward in lazy enjoyment by the lake shore.

Gradually the landscape began to slip from his vision. "Ah, how good is this siesta," he thought, the lids dropping over his eyes.

There was the hum of voices somewhere around. It went on for some time. Reluctantly he half opened his eyes, blinked. The dead level of his gaze with the things

around him gave them a strange appearance. He observed the strip of shingle that fringed the shore. The shining multi-coloured pebbles half turned over to the lap of the waves, he noted the pile of small, bleached shells that lay on the sand, and, nearer to his feet, a carpeting of husks of washed up reeds that smelt strangely. Then something made a noise, and with cries of alarm some water-hens, divers and baldcoots came fluttering from the rushes into the open, beating the water with their wings. He watched with lazy interest the active little divers, their blunt tails pointing skyward for a moment before they drove under; speculated as to where their heads would pop up presently. The water-hens made complaint in their ugly voices, then struck for the shelter of the island.

In the silence which followed, Brendan Nilan heard the low murmur of conversation somewhere in the stretch of rushes. He wondered if people got their accents, the intonations of their voices, from the circumstances of their surroundings. There was something in these voices that had an affinity to their surroundings. Then he remembered suddenly that they were not unlike his mother's accent in New York when she spoke of Ireland in reminiscent mood. His eyes went out over the water with somewhat of a more roused interest. At the same moment the prow of a row-boat came gliding out of the rushes.

There were two people in the boat, one rowing, the other bent over a book at the stern.

"Girls!" Brendan Nilan murmured, his interest struggling with his drowsiness. He followed the movements of the girl who rowed with half-closed eyes but

growing critical interest, his thoughts running this way: "Her hair is fair, and there is a bright ribbon on it. She is active, has good energy. But she does not row well. She plunges the blades too deeply. There she has made an ugly splash. She will catch a crab next time. She could not feather her oar to save her immortal soul. She has not learned the business on Manhattan Bay as I have. I guess she's young."

The girl who rowed turned her head shoreward, and saw Brendan Nilan lying there. She spoke to her companion in a low tone, but not low enough. She forgot that a gentle breeze blew shoreward and that voices carry far on quiet waters. Brendan Nilan heard the words. They were preceded by a little warning cough:

"Ah-hem! A man!"

The girl at the stern of the boat looked up with a start, abandoned literature at once. She followed the direction of her companion's eyes and regarded the figure on the shore quietly for a little. When she spoke she, too, was indiscreet.

"Is it?" she asked.

"It looks like it."

"It does and it does not."

"It must be a young one."

"Let us pray hard that it may be."

There were a few more splashes of the oars, then the litany was resumed.

"Is it alive, do you think?"

"Yes, it stirred; I'll swear I saw it move."

"It might be asleep."

"Or perhaps dreaming."

"Yes. 'In the Spring, a young man's fancy——' "

"Oh, Martha, don't. I hate that kind of thing. It's sickly."

And there were some vigorous splashes of the oars.

Brendan Nilan followed the course of the boat with his half-opened eyes. It made for a wall that divided two fields and jutted out some way into the lake, boulders of rock making a breakwater at its extremity. There they landed. They wound a chain from the boat about one of the rocks. It struck Brendan Nilan as about one of the most inefficient ways he had ever seen for mooring a craft. His mind at once saw possibilities in the slackness.

The girls had to make little springs from rock to rock to get to the shore. They did so with great care, keeping their skirts well about their legs, conscious that a pair of adventurous male eyes were levelled upon them. When they made the shore they at once struck across the field, linked, looking as innocent as possible.

Brendan Nilan felt it was up to him to betray some mild courtesy. He stood up. As he did so he noted with some satisfaction that the boat was already drifting away from the wall, the chain giving link by link with each wash of the waves.

He turned to the girls, raised his cap, and said in a tone of easy self-assurance:

"Beg pardon. Your boat is drifting away, but I shall make it all right."

There was a little suppressed exclamation, and the girls at once turned and ran back to the wall. Brendan Nilan gave them reasonable odds, then sprinted along the shore. There was a great flapping of skirts in front of him. One was a short, thick-set, sturdy figure,

the limbs taking rapid and business-like strides. The tall figure went more wildly, covered more ground, stumbled more frequently. He passed them within a few yards of the wall, stepped nimbly along the rocks and reached for the drifting boat. He towed it carefully to the shore by the chain, and then drew it well up in the strip of sand.

"Now," he said, "it will be safer there."

II.

He turned to the girls with a direct gaze. They were standing together, trying to hide a mixture of embarrassment and amusement.

"You are very good," the fair-haired girl said, politely.

"We are very much obliged," the taller girl added, and he thought there was a note of banter in her tone.

"I don't know if it is quite safe there," he said. "What is to prevent somebody from taking it?"

"There is nobody at all about here to take it," the fair-haired girl said.

"And am I nobody?" he asked.

The girl looked him up and down quickly. She had shrewd eyes, and he had a feeling that she took a good deal in at a glance.

"You're an American," she said. There was a sense of charity in not calling him a Yank.

"Then is it because I'm an American I'm nobody?" he asked.

"You misunderstand," broke in the tall girl. "It is because you are an American, Miss Noonan has said there is nobody here who would steal our boat."

Brendan Nilan made a little courtesy.

"The subtlety of the Irish compliment was lost on me," he said.

"Are you long over?" the fair one asked, her head a little to one side.

"Two days."

"And were you never in Ireland before?"

"Never."

"Fancy that! And you have not much of the twang."

"I'm so sorry if I disappoint." Then assuming that exaggerated staccato which is inseparable from the outfit of the returned Irish-American, he said: "When I got on the pond I said, 'They won't be up to my talk in the old dart,' and I coughed it right up."

The girls laughed, feeling more at ease with this unexpected find.

"But my parents were Irish right through," he went on, volubly. "My father was a Nilan and my mother's name was Mulvehill, and she came from Clonlea."

There was a little movement of surprise on the part of the taller girl.

"That is only twelve miles from here," she said.

"I'm going there to-morrow," he went on. "I rested in the hotel at Ballyrea for a little to recover from the sea-sickness. I did not wish to frighten my people with a face as green as a sick moon. In fact, it is partly for the sake of my health I have come to Ireland. I'm hoping it will put me on my legs again. And my name is Brendan Nilan."

The girls listened to this little autobiographical outbreak with interest. His manner was easy, and he spoke with a directness, a self-assertiveness, to which they were unaccustomed.

"Now," he said, "it's all out. What about your stories? Is it not only fair I should have them in honour of the boat?"

"Our stories?"

"Yes, all about yourselves."

"Ah, we have not much to tell," said the fair girl. "This is Miss Martha Lee, and I am one Ellen Noonan. We come from Ballyrea beyond, the greatest town in creation."

Brendan Nilan measured the girl as she spoke. Like her companion, she wore no hat, and was simply dressed in rather sombre colours. Under the fair hair was a plain, healthy face, rather square, with high cheek bones, the nose thick and suggestive of character, the eyes bright and set far apart, the mouth giving her an expression of some hardness.

"Your story is short and sharp," he said.

The girl turned from him, stooping for some slits of stone with which she attempted to make ducks-and-drakes on the water. He noted the active swing of the arm, the suggestion of sturdiness in the short limbs, the broad hips, the general breezy activity which swamped all sense of self-consciousness.

"It is easy to see," he told himself, "that that young lady was built for a windy climate."

He turned to the girl whose name was Martha Lee.

"Don't you think her story is good?" he asked, sitting down on a rock, lighting a cigarette with the

air of a man who was well pleased with himself and the company.

"Yes, the short and simple annals of the poor," she replied, with a demure air that he suspected.

Brendan Nilan took a good look at Martha Lee. The figure was tall, with that mysterious, splendid slender grace which suggests dawning womanhood. The complexion was so deep in its olive glow that he connected her at once with Southern blood. He could imagine her fitting into a Spanish environment very naturally. The face was long, finely, and in some respects delicately moulded. The hair was brushed back from a brow that gave her intellectual distinction. The mouth had a lack of firmness, the lips betraying sensitiveness. The chin looked as if it had some original intention of being prominent and determinate, but failed, giving some sense of corroboration to the lack of firmness in the mouth, yet adding a touch of wilfulness to her expression. Her eyes were downcast: she tapped at a tuft of moss on the ground with her toe, he thought, impatiently. A twitch of sensitiveness in the lips betrayed the knowledge that she was under male scrutiny. Then she raised her eyes, and they lent her face something which it lacked—animation, impetuosity, and still that mixture of irresolution and wilfulness which left him speculating. The eyes were rich in colour, so much in harmony with the face that they gave it almost a touch of glory.

Brendan Nilan, as he gazed up at her, smoked his cigarette in little, short, quick puffs, proclaiming the fact that his interests were stirred, alive, eager. He felt his mind going over the name—Martha Lee—like a fact that had got to be noted and remembered.

"Martha, we must hurry up," Ellen Noonan broke in, giving up her attempts at ducks-and-drakes on the water. "We are going up to the Dowager Countess's place," she added, turning to Brendan Nilan, at the same time fixing up some loose strands of her hair.

"Is there a Dowager Countess along here?"

"There is, bedad, a real live one. Her house is in there through the woods."

"I should just feel tickled to see it."

"Then come along with us. We'll show you the way."

Brendan Nilan, as he gazed up at her, "Calling on this Dowager, are you?"

"Not to-day," Martha Lee said, looking at him a little slyly. Then she returned to the tuft of moss at her feet, beating it up with her toe. Something that bore a resemblance to a frown clouded her face. Was she annoyed at her companion's invitation to him, Brendan Nilan wondered? He had a hazy idea that she might, on the other hand, be a little malicious in pretending to stand up for the proprieties. Anyhow, Ellen Noonan's perfectly healthy breeziness bore her suggested objection down. She turned with the other two, and after they had taken a few steps together, laughed in a soft voice.

A thrush was whistling in the trees, imperious, ringing, the tenor of the groves. Some blackbirds sounded deeper and more quaint notes farther away. Small birds twittered in the shrubberies. A tit-lark rose up before them, a queer parody on his more famous namesake of the sky. There was that in the atmosphere which spoke

of Spring, of a calling to life of dormant things, a great trumpeting by Nature of her annual reveille.

The two girls lost all sense of embarrassment and temporarily, all their curiosity as to their companion. They were moved by the sense that, although the dead leaves of Autumn crackled under their feet, beneath them were stirring the little tendrils that proclaimed the coming of another generation. They began to hop and skip and take little races along the grass; to laugh and shout, to whirl about until they became dizzy. Brendan Nilan smiled at their frolicking, but he became so affected that he found his own feet moving to queer little skips, while he hummed Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." Though not much their senior, he had a more sober outlook, was a tougher subject when it came to an elementary emotion of this sort. He had come out of a different environment, had been born into a civilisation which puts the pressure of life early on young shoulders. In thought and in reading he was already grown, even disciplined. In his own country, among his companions, he had been reckoned a student of life with some intuition for its psychology, and in his philosophy of life there was an undercurrent of humour that amounted, despite its occasional irony, to almost a charity. That good thing—the boy heart—was, with all this, still his possession, and now it ruled the day.

For were not these new-found companions pleasant company, fr sh in their naturalness, quaint in their impulses—was not the scent of a new life in an old land a thing to make the steps light, and did not the voice of the thrush speak on the greening bough?

CHAPTER II.

A WALK IN THE WOOD.

THEY passed into the wood by a little gate. Before them was a narrow path winding in and out through the trees, and to the left another path with a board nailed to a tree, which bore in white letters the word "Private."

"That is where the old Dowager walks," Ellen Noonan said in a somewhat awed voice. "She does not wish anyone to see her."

"What a terrifying ogre she must be," Brendan Nilan said. "Does she keep a blue dragon in her castle?"

"She's very particular," the girl replied. She appeared to be sobered, and even a little afraid at the thought of the possible hidden but near presence of the Dowager Countess. The democrat turned in the American.

"If she happens along," he said, "I'll say 'Good afternoon, are you the Dowager Countess? Well, I'm Brendan Nilan. How do you do?' "

An irrelevant scream of delight broke in on the declaration of independence.

"Oh, Martha, look!" Ellen Noonan cried, "the primroses are out!"

In another moment her short legs had carried Ellen Noonan out of sight.

Brendan Nilan turned to Martha Lee. But she, too,

had vanished. A crackling of dry twigs somewhere through the trees alone gave a clue to her whereabouts.

"Well, I'm——," Brendan Nilan murmured, then added as he gave chase——"blessed!"

The light in the wood was subdued. The ground was thick, soft and spongy with an accumulation of many seasons' leaves, brambles, grasses, and cones from the fir trees. There was a pungent agreeable scent in the still air. The place was full of murmuring voices of birds chattering about their nesting.

A little way in he struck an embankment, looking like some prehistoric line of demarcation. On this embankment flourished a wild growth of briars, hazel, quicks, with here and there a laurel, woodbine or lilac waiting its day. Sloping up to this growth on the embankment there was a network of trailing ivy and, bursting up through its intricacies, clumps of ferns, hart's tongue, and primroses. Following this trail, Brendan Nilan soon came upon the guides who had abandoned him. They were gathering the primroses silently, intently taking little runs from one clump to another, like bees eager for the gathering of the honey.

They were so intent on their work that they took no notice of him. Already they had sizeable bunches of the blooms, and he stood over Martha Lee, admiring the deft manner in which she worked young ferns through the flowers. There was nothing for him to do except to help in the primrose gathering. All this time he was conscious of a queer continuous sound murmuring through the wood, sometimes far off, again quite near, but always elusive. It was strangely primitive and grew upon him.

"What noise is that?" he asked at last.

"Noise!" Ellen Noonan exclaimed, setting back on her heels as she knelt before the embankment. She laughed heartily.

"That is the cooing of the wild pigeons," Martha Lee said.

"I have only read of it in books," he apologised. "I thought it was somebody grumbling all the time."

"Not at all. That is himself, full of airs and graces, doing all the talking on a branch beside herself. He's telling her how much he loves her."

"And has she nothing to say?"

"She's taking no notice whatever of him, for he's an awful old fool."

Brendan Nilan listened to the wild pigeons for a little time.

"Does he never get tired of saying the same thing over and over again, day in day out? Does she never feel like murder?" he asked.

"Not she," Martha Lee made answer. "It flatters her. He's got to keep it up under a threat to fly away from him."

"How hard that is on the poor bird!"

"He has consolations. If you come back next year, you'll hear him telling the same story over again to another one."

"Ah," said Brendan Nilan, "I thought that the note sounded traditional, the sentiment universal. How like the rest of the world the wild pigeons are!"

"Aye," Martha Lee said, half-absently, touching up her display of flowers, "pigeons or people, it's lick alike."

Something sprang from behind a clump of ferns, and he saw a vision of brown fur and the streak of a white scut disappear into the embankment further up. Brendan Nilan leaped back in surprise.

"There," he cried, "something alive has run away."

"If it was not alive it would likely have stayed where it was. What do you think?"

"What was it, anyway?"

"A young rabbit."

The boy broke out in Brendan Nilan. He dashed for the embankment, falling down on his hands and knees where a burrow had been scooped at the butt of the embankment, staring in. The earth was red as gold, fine as dust, where it had been scooped out. His face was so close to the ground that he smelt the strange odour of the wet clay with almost an animal instinct. He heard the laugh of the girls behind him.

"Why don't you go in and catch him, man alive?"

"He was too quick."

"Nonsense, and you a Yank!"

"But, say, come right here. He has made it all twisty so that nobody can see in."

"How clever of him! Who would credit a rabbit with having so much brains?"

Brendan Nilan rose from the rabbit burrow. As he did so, Ellen Noonan screamed at him.

"Oh, you're just a man all over. See what you've done."

He followed the direction of her accusing finger and a look of guilt came into his face. The primroses he had gathered had fallen from his hand, and in his excitement he had buried them with his knees into the

wet clay. He stooped and raised one of the blooms, limp and crushed.

"It's like so many great hopes," he said to Martha Lee, letting it drop back to the earth.

The girl looked at him attentively, and he was conscious of her fine eyes.

"Bathos," she said, unexpectedly.

"I don't quite reckon you," he said, drawing up to her side.

The girl hummed, an absent-minded sort of hum, and followed Ellen Noonan down to the path. Brendan Nilan had, for the first time, the feeling, vague and doubtful, of having received a rebuff. He wondered if he had been a little "too fresh." He rose reluctantly, and trailed after them.

The journey through the wood brought them to the garden at the back of the residence of the Dowager Countess. A gardener, plump, red, and hairy as a ripe red gooseberry, confronted them behind the iron railings of a narrow gate. Brendan Nilan knew that if he got the least squeeze coming through the gate he would burst. The girls gave him an order for vegetables for some trader in Ballyrea, and he went down a row of bushes to ripen himself better in the sun.

"That was our business here," Ellen Noonan said, as they returned through the wood.

The day waned rapidly. The birds made bursts of song in a great thanksgiving, and a flame of light in the west penetrated the woodland, transforming its whole appearance, the straight pines standing up like pillars in some great cathedral, shafts of the light falling through spaces in the branches, making a rich carpeting

of the ground. They made their way to the shore in silence, Brendan Nilan's spirits drooping as they went. He made the boat ready for them, helping them aboard as he stood on a rock. Ellen Noonan took to the oars again, Martha Lee humming cheerfully as she sat in the stern.

"Are you not tired," he asked, as he held the chain loose in his hand.

"I'm not tired," Ellen Noonan said, in a matter-of-fact way, but perhaps——" She looked up at him squarely.

"Oh, yes, I can row quite well," he said.

Brendan Nilan looked to where Martha Lee had seated herself. Her eyes were downcast, and she tapped a footboard with her toe, he thought, impatiently.

"Perhaps Miss Lee does not wish me to get into the boat," he said, with quick directness. She only gazed languidly at him, then something that looked like a danger signal flashed for a moment in her eyes. A gull that flew low, swaying like a little white ship in the pink light, cried out overhead. Brendan Nilan dangled the chain suggestively, inquiringly. Ellen Noonan sat still, the oars in her hand, her plain face expressing a non-committal humour at the situation.

"It would surely be more pleasant to walk," Martha Lee said, her voice low, soft, musical.

Brendan Nilan fancied that she secretly desired him to come while her words seemed to forbid the privilege. She leaned back lazily in her seat, her arms out on either side of the bows of the boat, her fingers playing with little sprays of the water. The lids drooped over her eyes, shutting off their glory. The reclining attitude

showed off the slender figure, her long neck, her breasts, suggested through the blouse.

"She is doing Cleopatra very well," he told himself. "I am to be the abashed worshipper who must kneel with many others without the temple of this local goddess." He showed a gleam of his golden tooth in the fading light.

"I guess I'll hoof it," he said, more nasal than he had been the whole evening.

The chain fell into the prow of the boat with a clatter. He pushed the little craft clear of the rocks. The waves beat a quick tattoo along her bows as she took the water.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye—good-bye," came back from the boat.

He stood poised on the rock for some time, watching the heavy lunges of the oars, the energetic, squatty, unromantic figure of Ellen Noonan silhouetted against the water that had caught the flame of the sky.

CHAPTER III.

TWELVE STRONG MILES.

I.

NEXT day, Brendan Nilan found himself standing at the door of his hotel in Ballyrea, a rug on his arm, surveying the side-car which had been drawn up at the kerbstone to convey him to his people in Clonlea.

The jarvey, sharp-faced, fiery-eyed, was active, but hobbledehoy, and it seemed to Brendan Nilan, from the manner in which he bustled about the car, casting rope ends in all directions, pulling and tightening and knotting, that he was preparing for a journey to the ends of the earth.

"Are you afraid we shall have a breakdown?" he asked at last.

The jarvey wiped his steaming forehead with a great red handkerchief. "A breakdown, is it?" he asked. "You'll be as safe on that car as if you rode on a traction engine. Up with you now, sonny, the mare has got her share of oats, and she's snorting to scatter the miles behind her. Easy there, now, Fanny, that's the girl."

The mare drew the car through the streets of Ballyrea in a very deliberate, not to say cautious, trot. She struck Brendan Nilan as a very experienced campaigner, reserving her going powers in case the journey should prove to be a trying one. It was the first time he rode

on an outsider. He hitched his back up against the trunk stacked up on the well of the car, clutched the iron rail that was cutting into his hip, and resolutely banished from his mind all memory of the trolley cars of New York. People stood at shop doors looking up at him as he passed. Rows of uneven houses, gapped by tumble-down places, straggled along the streets. The place appeared rain-swept and wind-swept by the centuries, leaving in the hearts of the inhabitants an appalling prejudice against paint. In the upper window of a house he was attracted by the flutter of some white thing, and he smiled as he saw Martha Lee seated there. She was apparently engaged at work upon some garment. He raised his cap. Her hand shot up in response; she held a great scissors in her fingers, the blades pointing downward, and he wondered what it reminded him of. It flashed suddenly upon him. It was the Arms of Connacht. He knew the design, because it always crowned the decorations of the hall in which the Connacht Men's Society of New York gave their annual ball. He had often speculated as to the meaning of the upraised hand and the dagger, and it tickled him that the action of Martha Lee should have brought so bloodthirsty a subject back to his mind. The next moment the car swung round a corner, and they were out into the open country.

The road led them westward. The country seemed to grow more sterile as they went. First, a flat, brown bog, dotted with dim pools, then fields that grew more and more contracted, the grey stone walls seeming to crush the people into little spaces. Whole patches of country were covered with bracken, broom and furze. Russet

browns and dull greens coloured the slopes. Up through the bracken there constantly showed great shoulders of white masses, gleaming coldly in the clear air. Brendan Nilan beheld them with something of a fascination. It looked as if some strange monsters had been buried in the earth, and that time had worn down their graves so that their bulky limbs pushed up to the sight of men. Yet he knew that they were nothing only great masses of rocks bleached by exposure to the winds and rains of the place.

Suddenly they would dip into a valley, verdant, sheltered, warm, where bird voices sounded once more. Through the branches of trees he would catch the flash of a river and now and again a feudal mansion, gloomy and exclusive, loomed out of the background. He had gazed with awe upon the little thatched cabins that they had come upon, dotted along the roadside, or clustering in hamlets in the fields, the crookedest and the narrowest little roads reaching up to them that he had ever imagined possible. The naked poverty of most of these dwellings had filled him with depression. Farm houses of the better class were to be seen, but they were few and unable to live down the domination of the hovel.

Brendan Nilan was swift in his adaptation to new surroundings, simple where the average returned Irish-American would be grotesque through sheer swagger, but he could not banish, try how he would, a disquieting sense of fear at sight of these hovels—fear that he might find his own people sunken in this ugly primitive life. What if he found them living in a hovel? How could he endure a life that could not be otherwise than squalid, lowering in its exactions, degrading in its ignorance,

terrible in its poverty? Half-remembered stories he had heard in the club rooms in New York, things that he had read in books and newspapers, came back to him, destroying the easy feeling with which he had set out to settle down indefinite years in Ireland. He thought of the wavering of his mother when the doctors had backed up the change, of the little puckers on her brow, of the letters, half of warning, half welcome, which he had got from Clonlea. One sentence in a letter from his cousin, Mark Cusack, jumped to his mind. "We have nothing good to offer you in Clonlea except, maybe, the grace of God." But he had ruled out all the objections, made up his mind to see the thing through. Sometimes he thought that there was something of the call of the blood in it, that the pain of exile which had made a misery of his mother's early years in America had been transmitted to his veins. He had no sentiment, no hankering after the heroic, in this flight to the pastoral life of the country of his parentage—quite the contrary. He had come because he had a belief that in his physical circumstances Ireland would offer him a better life and an environment not at all outside his temperament. He had left the throbbing life of the great city into which he had been born, with regrets. He had many ties there. He was of account in the intellectual dissipations of his companions; he had contributed to such culture as they were able to build up for themselves—he had even made some battle as a "high brow"—and it was no easy matter to cut himself off from interests that were almost a passion. He was prepared for a bitterness in the sense of loss of the things that had made up the civilisation that he enjoyed. At the parting time he had suffered

from the wrench, and still in the days of the sea voyage that followed he had seen all these things fade away, visionary as a white wraith in the wake of a spent sunset. Something else loomed up in the distance—a new life, or was it an old life new lived?

It was an easy matter for him to figure out a struggle in the abstract in a life in rural Ireland. He knew enough about the country secondhand from his parents to expect disappointments, even shocks. He had heard much about the cabins in Ireland; their drawbacks were admitted, but usually rounded off by a picturesque sentiment. But to hear about these semi-sentimental cabins and to see them under his eyes, and to contemplate a life in one of them, were two wholly different propositions.

He now looked down upon a hovel on the lonely roadside with a critical attention that bred a dread. The miserable half-sodden thatch hanging unkempt about the drab crooked walls, the futey window, the queer half-door over which wreathed puffs of smoke that scented the air, the glimpse of the gloomy interior, the sunken, swampy passage from the road to the door—it all told of a poverty that chilled his blood. His eyes wandered over the neglected garden behind the hovel with its remnant of a potato pit, a few stumps of beheaded cabbage plants, two melancholy fir trees holding sentinel over it all, their branches all blown in one direction, looking like the flame of a candle blown flat in a breeze. The figure of a woman moving about in a cloud of smoke in the interior of the next hovel held his attention. She leaned out over the half-door for a moment, her eyerims red and raw from the turf smoke, and emptied a

tea-pot of its stewed leaves on to the kerb-stone. And the man standing by the gable—what a picture he made! His thin, weak frame was hitched up against the wall as if he were too spent to stand up on his legs. His face was long, narrow, lined, grey, a look of hunger about the wide mouth—"the Famine Mouth," Brendan Nilan called it. The droop in the shoulders, the vague look in the eyes, the attitude of hopeless ineptitude, the pathetic inquiry in the face that was raised for a moment to the car that went by—Brendan Nilan shrank at the sight of him.

"'A bold peasantry, their country's pride,'" he quoted ironically. This peasant looked so spent that he appeared even beyond the courage of despair. What if his own people were no better? What if they had been ground down to the same level? His two cousins—he thought of them. They should be in or about his own age. Surely their youth, if nothing else, would save them from the condition of this advertisement of premature senility that he saw nailed to the cabin wall? At the worst, allowing that they, too, were submerged, he would be able to make an effort to give them some grip on a better life. The thought of a battle to be fought, of some definite mission ahead, restored him to some of his normal optimism.

II.

The mare came to a halt, looking back between her winkers as much as to say: "The passengers will now oblige by getting down to walk." Already the jarvey

was on the ground, swaying on his uneven legs about the car.

"It's a great hill, my son, a drag in it that would pull the heart out of a beast, and a little walk is good for a man so as his liver might be roused. So we'll breast the rise on the road and serve man and beast," he said, looping up the reins.

Brendan Nilan scrambled half reluctantly from his seat. Before them was a sharp hill. The mare walked on, picking her steps as slowly and softly as a cat. She tacked gently, going from side to side of the road as far as its breadth would allow. She did so to avoid the sheer pull of the hill. The jarvey and passenger brought up the rere. "She's no bad skin at all," the jarvey said. "I drove worse travellers than her, and, mind you, she was threatened with the spavin. A gammy time I had in face of her fetlocks, the heart and soul scalded in me with the dint of bathing and poulticing; slaving I was at her for months, trying this cure and that cure given to me by quack vets and cow doctors. In the end, says I, 'I'll leave her to the Lord,' and I put her out on grass, and in a month she was frisking her tail and cracking up and down the paddock like a good one."

"You made an artist of her to boot," Brendan Nilan said, watching the light steps of the mare, her avoidance of any unnecessary pull. He was beginning to hope the hill would not turn out to be as long as the rest of the journey. "Have we much farther to go?" he inquired.

"Not very far now when we round the demesne wall at Meenloch, just where the gullet is and the ancient gateway, two coping stones sticking loose from the mossy pillars like yellow fangs gaping in an old man's

mouth. After that the fall will be with us into the bright parish of Clonlea."

"It seems a long twelve miles."

"To be sure it does. In all your born days did you ever hear tell of a twelve mile that did not appear long to a man who wanted to get home? And I tell you no lie at all, but the shining white truth, that each and every one of the twelve is a strong mile, and, maybe, a very strong mile. For it's a noted thing by all scholars and saints and travelling holy men that every mile that reaches west is a strong mile, and the more to the west you reach the stronger they grow. That's a habit of the country."

"Do you know the house of my people in Clonlea?"

"What is the name of the family, son? Cusack, did you say?"

"Yes, Cusack."

"There's an old limping woman there—an ancient female beholding to her stick."

"I don't know about the stick, but I expect to see an old woman there—my grandmother, Mrs. Mulvehill."

"Aye, I saw her. Well, then, she has a daughter—a round, plump widow, her man taken from her and she only in the prime of her blood."

"That might, for all I know, describe my aunt, Mrs. Cusack."

"I saw the widow Cusack, and as well as my memory serves me, she had two hefty sons, freckled lads, that were born, if I might say, with spades in their fists."

"I can't throw any light on the freckles or the birth phenomenon, but you may be hitting off my two first cousins, Mark and Luke Cusack."

"Mark and Luke. Well, now, them two names do remind me of the Apostles and of the Sunday in Lent with the long Gospel, the pins quaking under me from the woeful strain of listening to the great rolling Latin given out by the priest from the altar."

"Anyhow, you know the family?"

"I do, in troth, know the family. I was in that house twice. The first time it was a funeral that come out of it—a great funeral that stretched down a mile of good road, the women bereaved sitting up on the coffin on the cart and their *ologone* going out another mile of the road, for it was the man of the house that they were burying. The second time was when I drove a brace of Limerick pig jobbers that were out forestalling. It was a melting hot day, and what with the flaming tongues of the sun and the fearful load, bones and guts, of the Limerick live weight, it all preyed upon the car, and off rolled the rim of the left wheel, clattering down the road in front of me. I went into Cusack's for help and I got it. A very respectable family, well thought of by the people."

Brendan Nilan was not reassured. He knew it would be the business of this jarvey with the picturesque tongue to praise his people. The mare stood on the top of the hill to permit the passengers to remount, and the journey continued.

Brendan Nilan fell into a reverie, a feeling of greater depression than ever closing in upon him. The scenery repeated itself, and he ceased to take any interest in it. He felt weary, stupid, suffering from one of his melancholy lapses, by the time the driver shouted across the

trunk, "Now, you can raise three almighty cheers, for we're sporting into the bright parish of Clonlea."

It did not rouse him. He looked down the white deserted road without any interest. When the car pulled up at last he had to shake himself together.

III.

They were in front of a house a little way in from his side of the road. It was a long, low house roofed with thick thatch, the walls yellow, covered with the shoots of creepers on which the foliage was dead. A porch in the centre of the house was hung with masses of the tangled shoots of rambler roses. A trim hedge of quicks separated the road from the front garden. Up to the door of the porch there was a narrow sanded walk bordered with flowering currants on which pale green leaves and bunches of pink blossoms were already flourishing. He smelt their peculiar odour. The house and its surroundings looked cared for, snug, conventional, almost familiar. A great quiet brooded over it all. Not a sound was to be heard except the cackling of some fowls at the back. A dog barked, his alarm dying away in a faint growl.

Brendan Nilan turned to the jarvey, who had made no move, the etiquette of his profession holding him to his seat.

"That's the house of the Cusacks," he said, indicating the house with his whip.

"I wonder if they got my letter? I mailed them a note from Ballyrea."

"When?"

"Last night."

"They'll get it the day after to-morrow, by the grace of God."

The dog barked again, then the door of the porch opened, and a woman thrust out her head and shoulders. Something jumped into Brendan Nilan's throat. All his weariness vanished. For one wild moment he thought it was his mother who looked out. When the woman stepped on to the front of the house he saw that she was a younger woman than his mother, had a more vivid complexion, a plumper figure. His aunt, his mother's sister! How often had he heard of her!

"Say, Aunt Sara, I've come. I'm Brendan Nilan," he called out.

With a little cry the woman came running out to the road, Brendan Nilan turned to get down from his seat. His foot was swinging vaguely from the ground when he felt two arms about him; he was half lifted from his seat; his head was smothered in a motherly bosom, a rain of kisses on his face.

"Brendan! I declare I'd pick you out of a thousand, for you have Mary's two eyes in the head of you!"

He was conscious of other voices, of the shuffling of hurrying feet, of shouts and the slamming of doors. When his aunt ceased her embraces there was a little crowd gathered about them.

"Where is he at all?" "Musha is this himself at last?" "Arra, *a mhic mo croidhe*, we thought you were never coming!" "Glory be to God, he's the image of his mother!" "Give us a hold of your hand!" "How's every bone in your body?" "Sure, it's played out he is, with the dint of travelling."

So the exclamations ran round about him as his hands were shaken. To save his life he could not say a word. There were men and women and young people grouped about him, seen indistinctly through wet eyes, men wearing white bauneens, grey homespun trousers, soft black hats, women in bare feet with heavy red petticoats and little grey shawls wrapped about their breasts.

The neighbours had gathered to give welcome to the son of Mary Mulvehill.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOMELAND.

I.

A SHRILL quivering voice broke in upon the excited chatter of the group of welcomers in front of the house.

"Where is he?" the voice asked. "Stand back there until I see him, you pack of good-for-nothings. What? And is that himself with the pale face and slim pair of limbs under him? Well, glory allelu!"

The people made way at once for a lively little old woman who came hobbling briskly on a stick along the sanded walk to the road.

"This is your grandmother," Mrs. Cusack said *sotto voce* to Brendan Nilan.

He went eagerly to the old woman, kissing her on the brow. She looked up at him, her face animated in its frame of white cap with frill and a bright blue ribbon. She clutched at his hands, fondling and patting them.

"Poor Mary's child, poor Mary's child," she kept repeating a little brokenly. "Isn't it Brendan was the name that she put upon you? Sure, what else would it be, and that the name of her own father, and he to be called after the saint that took the track of the ocean like herself. And what way is the creature at all; come in and tell me what way Mary is."

He linked the old woman into the house. They were followed slowly by all the people—a queer straggling procession. They passed through a narrow hallway, and

then found themselves in a wide kitchen. Mrs. Cusack ran to welcome the new-comer to a bench by the fire where the old woman sat beside him, clinging to him a little hysterically. He made rather incoherent replies to the eager questioning about his mother.

"Does she be getting that bad stitch in her side all the time? I saw her fainting off at the table a harsh March day, her teeth chattering, and that paleness in her cheeks that we thought she was no more. . . . Did she bid you say whether she was ever coming home to see us at all? I'm in dread I won't see her again this side of heaven. . . . You're hand is limp with the cold, a mac, and I make no doubt but that the chill of Thalav-na-Ucras is in your young bones already."

The people standing about began to speak among themselves, one man's voice dominating the conversation until his words began to sound like an address of welcome on behalf of the parishioners. He was a pompous stout man, looking like a teacher of the old school, and all his speeches were concerned with the days when Mary Mulvehill was to be seen stepping down the valley of Clonlea. He helped himself to great pinches of snuff. His long, black, semi-professional coat, buttoned tight, sagged over an aggressive paunch, and in this sag all the superfluous snuff lodged. It made a yellow line across the upper reaches of the stomach, looking like a gay hoop spanning a fat barrel. When he moved, one had the illusion that he revolved. A woman crossed the kitchen, smiling pleasantly, and Brendan Nilan's attention was at once held by her bare feet. The red petticoat she wore, caught above her sinewy hips with a white band, hardly reached to her calves. The shanks, sunburnt,

speckled and shiny, were slender, but the sinews from the instep downwards stood out like whipcord, the feet looking like the claws of some great bird. He could imagine the woman springing up some rocky steep, sure in her grip with those wonderful feet. She stood speaking to a man with a long narrow face, the thin lips drawn tight over his teeth, his expression so non-committal that it might be taken for a mask. Behind the mask one had a feeling that there was an ironic humour.

Some young girls huddled together away from the fire and the light, their shawls drawn over their heads, and in many cases across their noses, giving them the appearance of Eastern ladies. One girl, who lurked well back in the shadows, had looped the shawl about her face so that it merely allowed a peep-hole for a single eye. There was a good deal of elbowing and nudging among them, the sudden rearrangement of a shawl now and again revealing a very animated looking countenance, vividly coloured. A young man of about Brendan Nilan's own age, with a hanging under-lip, short-sighted, with prominent red rims about his eyes, blinked at him incessantly. An athletic fellow, not more than twenty, sunny-faced, with a great mop of gleaming fair hair brushed across his head, was sitting on the table, swinging his legs with energy. A man with an enormous upper-lip —what he had heard called "the potato lip" in America— grinned continuously at the conversation of the man who rolled about like a barrel. A woman with soft brown eyes, her expression one of great sweetness and womanliness, was wiping tears from her eyes with the corner of her check apron. "I was the friend of Mary Mulvehill since a bandle made a frock for her," she was saying.

"It was my hands that put the white veil over her head the Easter morning we went to be Confirmed by the Bishop, a saint of God, if there was ever one in this world. I was the friend of Mary Mulvehill and the friend of her heart until the day I stood at the Cross looking at her driving away for America. 'Good-bye, Cauth,' said she, 'for I'll never see you again.'"

"Och, mother, stop your whining," said the young giant who sat on the table. "It isn't a wake we're having. Don't put the heart across in the boy who has come to Clonlea."

"Indeed, I can't help it, Maurteen," the woman answered, "for the old things that never leave the heart are all stirred up within the inside of me."

Brendan Nilan's eyes met those of the young giant whom his mother called Maurteen, and it was a little exchange of understanding and friendliness.

"Come out and I'll be showing you the wonders of the world—the horses, the young colt, the cows, and the pigs," Maurteen said, springing from the table. "Luke is abroad looking after the driver and his old skin of a nag."

The old woman laid a detaining hand on Brendan Nilan's arm. "It's a rest you are in need of," she said "Don't heed Maurteen Conneely, for that rascal would have you up at the top of Slieve Gurm before a star hung in the sky. Besides, you must be dying for a cup of tea," his aunt added, swinging out a crane that hung over the turf fire. An iron fixture in the shape of the letter S was suspended from the crane, and on the under loop of this she hung a kettle, then built up the burning sods under it with extraordinary quickness.

"A cup of tea would be very welcome," Brendan Nilan admitted. "I feel a bit seedy after the ride on the car."

"But, sure, what was that to the great sailing you had over the dark ocean?" the old woman said.

"I don't know—I think that strong twelve miles of road took it out of me."

II.

When Mrs. Cusack took a teapot from the dresser, the people turned to go without a word. Brendan Nilan saw the fat man with the golden hoop wheel into the hall, a fantastic figure waltzing out, and immediately all the others followed like a flock of sheep going through a gap. Through the shuffling on the floor he heard the queer pad-pad of the woman with the bare feet. The girl who allowed one eye to peep through her looped shawl was the last to go, describing a semi-circular movement to the door, raking the kitchen and playing about the American after the fashion of a search-light. The detail that escaped that hidden eye must, Brendan Nilan concluded, be a detail indeed.

"I knew they'd quit when the meal was mentioned," Mrs. Cusack said, trotting about the kitchen. "It's manners," she explained to Brendan Nilan with a little laugh. That little laugh, the trick of his aunt in dropping her lids over her eyes at odd moments, the dark hair parted in the centre and brushed smoothly down, certain mannerisms, and the movements of the body, all reminded him strangely of his mother. "The tea

will be ready in the shake of a lamb's tail," she said, bustling out of the kitchen with a tray in her hands.

The old woman knelt at the fire, fixing up the sods of turf. He looked around the kitchen. Everything was scrubbed and white. The walls were lime-washed. A great display of cover dishes flashed back the flames from the fire. A dresser, some high bins, a shelf with a row of pails upon it, a churn, a spinning-wheel, deal tables, chairs crudely carved, some low stools, made up the furniture. Overhead the rafters and beams of the roof, as black as the night, showed dimly, giving an idea of great height. On each side of the open fireplace were doors leading into bedrooms. Another door, directly opposite to the hall-way, led out to the back premises. Flitches of bacon hung from hooks in the rafters over the fire.

The old woman returned to her seat and continued her questions about her daughter. As she spoke he was surprised to notice that her teeth were still even, white and strong. Wrinkles creased her forehead, lined her cheeks, and made crows' feet under her eyes, yet the complexion was good. The eyes were set far apart, keen, and all the features were singularly well proportioned and clear cut. The forehead was broad and high, the jaws terminating in a strong, firm chin. He concluded that in her youth the old lady must have been a striking-looking person. Later he discovered that the cast of her countenance was to be met with frequently in that part of the country, for it was the well favoured, eager, almost vehement, face of the purer bred of the Western Gaels.

The latch of the door leading to the back premises

was raised, and a young man came in with a scoop in his hand.

"Ah, Luke," the old woman said, "you have Brendan home at last. Did you shake hands with him, son?"

"Indeed, I did long ago, granny," he replied, without looking at his cousin. "Sure the way that crowd tore at him was enough to bewilder a badger. Such a pack of beagles!"

"I don't mind crowds," Brendan Nilan said quietly. "They don't worry me."

"Well, you're not used to meeting that kind of a crowd down Broadway, I go bail," Luke Cusack said, his voice testy.

Brendan Nilan was a little conscious of a rudeness in the manner of his cousin. He had not noticed him particularly in the crowd. He looked eagerly now at Luke Cusack, who crossed the kitchen to a bin into which he put the scoop. Luke was, he knew, the younger of his two cousins. He expected they would be thrown a good deal together.

Luke Cusack did not resemble either his mother or grandmother. His hair was fair—a nondescript tow colour—his face pale, with an even pink rising and falling over it at very short intervals, the eyes were small, set near together, and glowed unusually under fair bushy eyebrows that met over the narrow nose. He was rather tall, but sagged at the knees as he walked, his feet dragging slowly along as if they were a burden to him. The shoulder blades hitched forward, and the hands that hung by the grey homespun trousers were wiry and knotty and tanned. He looked like one who was much of an agricultural drudge. There was nothing

shy, and no trace of welcome in the expression of his face as he regarded the American with his near eyes. Brendan Nilan was conscious of Luke Cusack's meagre features, the under part of the face a mixture of stubbornness and weakness, the forehead narrow, the head small and ill-shaped. The new-comer had an impression that cousin Luke had a poor intelligence and was not likely to be of much account in any sort of intimate companionship. Luke had, he concluded, "taken after" his father's side of the family.

Mrs. Cusack showed them out to tea, which she had prepared in a comfortable, bright, warm room off the hall. The furniture was solid, old-fashioned, its virtues appealing to Brendan Nilan. As he sank into a chair he could not help heaving a little sigh of relief. He guessed he did not want to do battle in a very primitive existence. "I'm not a Tolstoi, and that's all there is to it," he told himself. He was simple in his tastes, but they had their limitations. Life at the best had its exactions, and he had no hankering to exaggerate them. He was pleased with the whiteness of the linen cloth on the table, glad to observe a large dish of slices of cold mutton, delighted with its flavour because it was from the ribs of a mountain sheep, full of approval for the old-fashioned comb of honey, the home-made jam, the great high soda cake. He bolted at the tea; its pungency was more than he could bear, and, to the great astonishment of the family, he had to tone it down with hot water. His work at the cold meat and the bread and butter was the source of adverse comment, and he knew by the way that they eyed him that the state of his health was measured strictly by the poverty

of his appetite. Luke Cusack demolished his food with extraordinary relish.

"By the way," Brendan Nilan asked suddenly, "where is Mark?"

The old woman, who sat at the head of the table, chuckled with much amusement. "Well, my son, I never saw anyone to make himself so much at home all at once," she said. "A body would conceit you were used to seeing Mark sitting by the table all the dear days of your life and missed him. And you never yet land eyes on the scoundrel."

"And another thing," Luke broke in, his jaws ceasing for a moment in their activity, "the people were remarking going away that when you talked you neither guessed nor calculated. Maurteen Conneely was saying that he never saw a Yank before but compared everything about him to something bigger in America. He thought it very odd you made no comparisons."

"I am very sorry if I do not keep up all the traditions," Brendan Nilan said quietly.

"But about Mark," Mrs. Cusack said. "He's gone to the assizes at Galway to give evidence in a land case. He'll be back to-morrow evening."

"A land case, did you say, mother?" Luke queried, and the women chuckled.

"Is the Irish agrarian trouble not over yet?" Brendan Nilan asked soberly. "I understood it was."

"Devil a fear of it," Luke Cusack declared, and with some satisfaction. "When you hear about this case you'll soon know that it's as fresh as the evening dew."

"Mark will have the whole story," Mrs. Cusack said. From the tone of her voice it was to be gathered that

Mrs. Cusack was rather proud of Mark. Brendan Nilan felt himself hoping—uncharitably—that Cousin Mark would turn out to be an improvement on Cousin Luke. But he remembered that mothers often acquire illogical affections for the wrong sort of sons. To the mother-mind the wastrel is often a joy, the lout a treasure, the weakling a hero.

After the meal the family sat around the kitchen fire and talked of America. Brendan Nilan forgot all his depression under the old world atmosphere of the place. He raked up every scrap of gossip touching upon the life of his father and mother, or about the people from the locality in the States, and it was eagerly devoured. He had to undergo a long cross-examination, and it was only when he showed signs of weariness that the conclave broke up.

Brendan Nilan slept in a great feather bed between four wooden posts that night. Luke Cusack slept in a smaller bed in the same room.

"It is here Mark sleeps," he said, "but they put me in to-night afeard you'd feel strange and lonesome."

They were some time in bed when the old woman came in leaning on her stick. She looked visionary, witch-like, to Brendan Nilan as she shuffled about, for there was only a dim red night-light burning before a picture of the Sacred Heart. She came to the bedside, tucking the clothes about him, and then went to Luke's bed to perform a like service—"A child of Mary's and a child of Sara's sleeping together. Let the praise be to the Almighty God this night," she said, going to the little altar, from which she took a bottle of holy water. She shook it about the beds and the room with a quill.

Then she made the sign of the Cross on their foreheads with her thumb. Raising her hand she spoke to Luke in Irish, and he repeated a prayer in the same language with her, a cadence in their voices. She went hobbling out of the room, taking the holy water with her. Brendan Nilan was conscious of a strange spiritual atmosphere which the old woman carried about with her.

"What was it she said?" he asked of Luke.

"It was a little prayer she taught Mark and myself to say in bed when we were small. We have said it ever since."

"It sounded like poetry."

"So it was. I hear it given in the *Beurla* this way:

"'There are four posters to my bed,
And on them are four angels spread:
Saint Mark, Saint Luke, Saint James, Saint John,
God bless this bed that I lie on.'"

Brendan Nilan lay back on the pillows for some time.

"How do you like to be here?" Luke asked, after a time.

"I am glad I came," Brendan Nilan replied.

"After all," Luke said, "it was neighbourly of the people to come to the house to bid you welcome."

"They seemed to have a great fondness for my mother."

"Ah, yes, and of course the family here at home are thought well of."

There was a note of impatience in Luke's tone. He obviously did not want all the praise to go to Brendan Nilan's branch of the family.

Brendan Nilan had noticed during the evening these

little touches of crankiness develop almost to hostility in Luke Cusack's manner. He made no reply. He was feeling very sleepy.

"Did you take stock of all the young damsels that come in to take your measure?" Luke asked after another pause.

"Yes—I saw them. At least, I saw all of them that was to be seen by the arrangement of the shawls. A great many bare feet, some noses, and a couple of pairs of eyes—and one almighty trained eye."

Luke chuckled. "Well," he said, "the girls round these parts are no great shakes of beauties anyway. But in the town of Ballyrea they have a name for good looks and bad manners. What is your opinion?"

"I only remember two of them," Brendan Nilan said, drowsily. "One had distinction."

"Who might she be, now?"

"Her name is Martha Lee."

There was silence in the room for some time. Brendan Nilan turned into the wall, snuggling himself in the clothes for the night. He was unaware of a movement in Luke's bed. But Luke Cusack had jerked up straight, staring across at the bed of his cousin, his near eyes blinking, his breaths coming in short gasps through his nostrils. He leaned a little over the side of the bed in his nightshirt.

"Do you know Martha Lee?" he asked in a low whisper.

There was no reply. Brendan Nilan had gone to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

A LOOK ROUND THE FARM.

BRENDAN NILAN was wakened next morning by a conversation outside his bedroom window. It went on for some time before he became conscious of any words. His eyes, as he regained consciousness, wandered over the unfamiliar room, taking in the heavy dark furniture, the row of small bright candlesticks on the altar, the curious pattern of the paper on the wall.

"A hungry beagle that would eat the devil's father," an angry voice said outside.

"We can't be all as wise as the Gubbaun Saor," another voice made answer.

Brendan Nilan's eyes followed the pattern of the wall-paper, tracing the journey of fantastic cables up and down as they linked together an amazing number of faded pink roses all of the one stereotyped bloom. As he puzzled out this fantasy he blended with it in a curious way the name of the Gubbaun Saor. Eventually he realised that he was in Ireland; he remembered the stories he had read of the Gubbaun Saor, a hero in Irish mythology who had performed great architectural feats and who was a successful domestic tyrant.

"Oaten cake for his wind and soup for the good of his guts, indeed! I'd see him to blazes and back before I'd gratify him with such pampering," a voice outside said.

Brendan Nilan looked around the room. Luke Cusack's

bed was empty. He sprang up, went to the window, drew back the curtain, and looked out. A green slope rising gently was vivid in the bright sunshine, the grass fresh after some light showers. Cousin Luke was walking across a field from the back premises. His figure was angular and his gait dragging. He disappeared over a grey stone wall. The young giant whom they had called Maurteen Conneely was standing near by, holding a greyhound in a leash. It was obviously Luke and he who had had the conversation.

"What's all the row about?" Brendan Nilan asked, opening the window.

"It's about Croppy, this fine hound here. Luke begrudges him the right feeding. He belongs to Mark, and I came up to take him out for an airing. He's a rattling dog out of Lightning by Sunrays, dam Wheel Home. Mark thinks there was never the likes of him on four feet, and, right enough, he won the Dunsandle Stake last year. He broke the slips once, got a thundering awful gruelling, but in his round made rings about Gentle Polly, and, I tell you, Gentle Polly was a clinking fine nimble bitch in her day."

"You are talking Greek to me," Brendan Nilan said. The hound yawned, showed a mouth of ivory teeth, and then shot out a great slobbering red tongue. "And in any case," he added, "I don't think I shall ever enthuse about dogs."

"Well, sure, if you don't itself, that will be more your misfortune than your fault," Maurteen Conneely said cheerfully, running his hands down the gams of the hound as if testing his muscular development.

"You promised to show me certain wonders last even-

ing," Brendan Nilan said. "Can you do so when I've had some breakfast?"

"Why not, to be sure," Maurteen Conneely replied, his face eager. "I'll be waiting for you."

"Right."

Brendan Nilan hurried through his toilet and found his grandmother and aunt in the kitchen. They were as fresh as ever in their appetite for news about America. The old woman prepared his breakfast, speaking and questioning all the time, and Mrs. Cusack, who was concerned with some calves outside, kept track of the conversation as well as she could, going in and out with pails in her hands, her steps elastic, a woman well accustomed to be kept on the move.

After the breakfast he invited the women to fish up the presents from the trunk his mother had sent. Another box was due from the hotel with his clothes and some favourite books. He enjoyed the alacrity with which the women descended upon the mystery of the trunk, their exclamations of delight and wonder as the treasures were taken out. He left them kneeling in adoration before the beauty of a silk dress for Mrs. Cusack, and found Maurteen Conneely waiting for him outside the porch.

They went along by the side of the house and walked into the farm yard. Brendan Nilan had a very keen sense of smell, and sometimes he felt it had its drawbacks.

"Say, that's a pretty robust whiff," he said, sniffing.

"That's only from the heap of manure above," Maurteen Conneely explained.

"Seems to me it's pretty rich," said the American.

"What's natural isn't wonderful," Maurteen Conneely philosophised airily.

There were some rambling buildings up one side of the yard; calves mewed from one of them, some hay bulged out from an upper window of another, a cart was half in half out of a gateway of a low-roofed structure. Fowls were picking about, a straight line of ducks, one after the other, ambled down the centre, obviously talking about the weather. A peevish hen was picking viciously at some nervous chickens. A dog barked and came round a gable, a flock of geese flapping their wings making a screaming protest.

"This is the young colt," Maurteen Conneely said, stepping in a dark doorway. Brendan Nilan followed him cautiously. There was a pungent smell in the place, the atmosphere hot and fœtid. The light was dim, so that he could only trace the outlines of a wooden manger over against the wall. The shape of a young horse moving restlessly in a corner attracted his attention. He could catch the flash in the wild-looking eyes. In the ceiling over the manger was a square hole which admitted a shaft of light from overhead. Up to this hole a narrow ladder, many of its rungs missing, led. As his eyes caught it he was rather surprised to see the grotesque figure of a small man rise apparently from the stable ground and vanish up this ladder into the loft overhead with extraordinary swiftness. Maurteen Conneely turned out of the stable, and Brendan Nilan followed him.

"What ran up the ladder?" he asked.

"Dominick."

"Who is Dominick?"

"He's a young-old fellow they have for doing things about the place."

"One of the help, do you mean?"

"He helps all right," Maurteen Conneely said. "Mark has a great fancy for him."

"Does he board in with the family?"

"He lives with the Cusacks, and he hid last night when you came."

"Hid?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He was afraid or ashamed of you—I forget which."

"But why should he be?"

"Because you are a stranger. You must understand the Cusacks took him in more for the sake of charity than anything else. His mother was a queer one—no great shakes at all—trapesing around the place, taking her share of drink, a great big, black-eyed, high-stepping woman that went the road with her hair hanging down like a mane, her eyes full of fire and devilment, game in every stir of her body. I heard tell that she used to give the men that would see her a turn in the brain. Well, she come to the bad. The priest drove her out of the place, for she was distracting the young fellows and making the old lads begin to fancy themselves again. Dominick was her son and—God bless the hearers—a child of shame. The Cusacks took him in and reared him when the mother went shouting and leaping out of the parish, a wild-blooded creature that no one ever heard of since. I often saw great game down the road when the gossoons coming home from school would peg Dominick in the gate with stones."

"What a pack of young prigs."

"Well, maybe they were not to be blamed. Dominick is what he is."

"So am I. So are you."

Maurteen Conneely pondered this proposition for a moment, then gave it up. He began to whistle cheerfully.

"Call Dominick out. As he is a member of the same household, I should know him."

Maurteen Conneely, who was evidently much amused, strode back to the stable-door and shouted in: "Dominick, you moosaun, come out and show your dirty mug. A gentleman here wants to see the beauty of the parish."

After some time, Dominick came out of the dim stable, wiping his face with his cap. He was a lad of sixteen and almost misshapen. The hands, powerful, square, knotty, with tremendous fingers, flat at the tips, moved uneasily as he looked up at the American, his eyes pale and sharp in a face one mass of freckles. He had broad hulking hips and limbs that were bandy; Nature seemed to anticipate that he would have to rough it early in life and crushed him into the frame of a parody on a man before he had time to grow up.

"Do you think Mr. Nilan is going to eat you?" Maurteen Conneely almost shouted at Dominick. "He's not a cannibal."

Dominick shrank from the aggressive young giant, a gleam of defiance at the same time in his eyes.

"Are you Dominick?" Brendan Nilan said, his conciliatory tone a snub to Maurteen Conneely. "I'm Brendan Nilan, and I've come to live here. Won't you shake?"

Dominick put out his great hand awkwardly and they shook hands.

"I hope we'll be friends," Brendan Nilan said.

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir," Dominick said, teasing the lining of his cap, his head hanging.

Brendan Nilan and Maurteen Conneely continued on their way, passing out from the yard to the haggard through a wooden gate. As he turned to close the gate, Brendan Nilan caught sight of Dominick. He was leaning up against the wall of the yard, his face smothered in his cap, his grotesque figure shaking with laughter.

"What on earth is he laughing at?" the visitor asked.

"I don't rightly know," Maurteen Conneely replied, dryly. "All I know is that he is not laughing at me."

They walked through several fields, all sloping upward. The grass was gleaming with raindrops, the earth smelt freshly, there was a crispness in the air. Sheep and cattle were cropping systematically at the young grass. Lambs followed the ewes about, vague-looking creatures on long, unsteady legs.

"This is all the Cusacks' farm," Maurteen Conneely said. "Mark has it well stocked; he is a very fine farmer."

Brendan Nilan had to take little trots now and again to keep up with the great easy strides of the other. He was quite breathless when they reached a low stone wall on the crest of the hill. Looking around, he saw they had a comprehensive view of the country.

"Is the sea far off?" he asked, sniffing at the air.

"A few miles. Look over there to the west."

Westward lay some ranges of dim mountains. Between them and nearer hills, well wooded, a vivid blue patch shone in the sun.

"That's Cuan Gurm, a slice of Galway Bay." Directly opposite to where they sat was another mountain, rugged and barren against the sky, streaks of deep purple and grey blue slate seaming its slopes. The low-lying reaches grew more vividly green as they dipped down into a valley. Some woods studded the country and a river worked a serpentine way to the sea.

"I see that Clonlea lies in a valley," Brendan Nilan said, his eyes going carefully over the place.

"Aye, snug between the hills," Maurteen Conneely said indifferently.

"Maurteen," a shrill young voice called out. They turned to see a small girl creep out of a sheep gap in the wall. She came up to them in a breathless run. She was dressed with extreme simplicity—A skimp crudely-fashioned holland garment clothing her, leaving her legs bare from below the knees and her arms from above the elbows. To her breast she held a young lamb, an inert half-famished thing, its head drooping over one of her arms. Brendan Nilan thought there was something familiar in the cold merry eyes, the prominent front teeth pushed out over the under lip.

She lowered her eyes, embarrassed, at the presence of the stranger.

"Sheela is my sister, and a very good girleen, indeed," Maurteen Conneely said, stroking the unkempt hair on the girl's head. "Where did you get the lamb, a cudh?"

"In the winterage, under a thorn tree, and the ewe wandered away from it with another lamb."

"It was only dropped last night," Maurteen Conneely said. The girl hugged the frail creature to her breast, concern in her face.

A bell tolled down somewhere in the trees beyond the river, its sound faint on the wind.

Maurteen Conneely took off his cap, and with his sister beside him blessed himself and inclined his head. The picture they made at once struck Brendan Nilan. It was reminiscent of Millet's "Angelus," and a little like other religious pictures he only remembered dimly. The half-famished lamb in the child's arms, the manner in which they stood in the wet, green grass, the barren mountain a faint background, the simplicity of their dress, the strength of their young figures, the peasant habit of grouping with unconscious but extraordinary effectiveness, the cadence of their intonations when they began to recite the words of the Angelus—it was all old world, primitive, and appealing to the observant American. It was unlike any Angelus he had ever heard recited in America, and as he listened to the words between the "Aves," the young giant and the child-girl answering each other back, they sounded new to him: "The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. . . . And she was conceived of the Holy Ghost. . . . Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to Thy Word. . . . And the Word was made flesh. . . . And dwelt amongst us."

"I don't think she will die now, Maurteen," the girl said when they finished. "What do you say?"

"I don't believe she will. Take her into Mrs. Cusack, put her lying beside the fire, and the heat will revive her."

The child ran down the hill as fast as she could. Maurteen Conneely turned to Brendan Nilan and said:

"Why did you not join in the Angelus?"

"It never struck me to do so. I was, however, very attentive."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"I was baptised and brought up a Catholic, of course; but, to tell you the truth, for quite a long time I have not been very keen on religion—or, perhaps, creed, I should say."

Maurteen Conneely's face was troubled, his lips pressed tightly together.

"I'm just built that way," the other said with some combat in his tone.

Maurteen Conneely looked at him and put this question very slowly and deliberately:

"If you go to hell when you die, what will you do?"

Brendan Nilan paused for a little, then made answer:

"If I go to hell when I die, I guess I'll stay there."

Maurteen Conneely paused in turn, thinking the thing over, then a smile lit up his face, Maurteen was of the temperament that did not permit problems to bite into him. He flicked them off when they pinched, as a cow flicks off flies with her tail.

"Let us come down to the tillage to Luke," he said. "He was down there since after daybreak to see the men at their work."

He vaulted lightly over a wall and waited for Brendan Nilan while he negotiated the loose stones with some misgiving. Some way down were brown patches of broken ground, men in white bauneens moving about them, a few horses and carts drawn up in a corner.

"Luke is a hard worker, I should say," Brendan Nilan suggested.

Maurteen Conneely's lips puckered.

"Middling, then," he replied in a tone that conveyed he had no great love for Luke Cusack. As they went down, the figure of Luke detached itself from the group of men in the tillage, and, as he came to meet them, Brendan Nilan was again struck with his slow gait, the sagging knees, the habit of dragging his steps after him.

"You slept like a top last night," Luke Cusack said as he approached them, looking at his cousin without smiling. "There wasn't a mag out of you and I leaving the room this morning."

"I felt tired, and I was quite comfortable," Brendan Nilan replied.

"Well, what do you think of Clonlea? Couldn't anyone with half an eye in his head tell that it belonged to savages?"

Brendan Nilan smiled at the joke, with an uneasy feeling that he would find it difficult to enjoy cousin Luke's humour.

"The dinner will be ready early to-day," Luke went on. "I have to drive to Ballyrea on some business and to meet Mark. He is coming on the evening train."

The three young men came down the hillside to the house together, Maurteen Conneely and Luke Cusack discussing the weather and crop prospects, Brendan Nilan's eyes wandering over the landscape. When they reached the farmyard, Maurteen Conneely went into an outhouse and came out with the hound held in a strap.

"I'm going to give him a bit of an airing," he said, going out to the road.

Luke Cusack stood looking after him for a little time and then turned to Brendan Nilan.

"If every Christian in the country got as much look-

ing after as them damn stinking dogs the world would be a sweet place to live in," he said. He walked into the house, and Brendan Nilan followed him trying to swing his mind on to the problems he found agitating the natives.

Mrs. Cusack came running into the kitchen, her face excited, to meet them.

"Luke," she cried, "such presents as Brendan brought. I have them spread out on the bed, and such a sight! Come here and see them." She hustled him into the bedroom. Brendan Nilan heard the voices going in the room for some time, his aunt voluble, Luke's tones, he thought, growing more cranky. Then he heard some of the conversation.

"I don't like the look of it," Luke Cusack said. "It may be only all a blind, and I believe it is all a blind. Throwing dust in people's eyes."

"What in darnation can he mean?" Brendan Nilan asked himself; then Luke Cusack came out from the room. His eyes were fixed on his cousin, his pale face nasty in its expression.

"Your mother was well hoaxed up to send all that value to Clonlea," he said.

"She was anxious to be remembered by some little gift to everybody," Brendan Nilan replied.

"Well, my opinion is that 'twould be fitter for her to hold the half of them," Luke Cusack said.

Brendan Nilan looked at him coolly, then shrugged his shoulders, making a little contemptuous gesture with his hands. As Luke Cusack caught the gesture of contempt and its meaning a thin pink flush spread evenly over his face. His eyes brightened until they glowered

at the other. He caught the lapel of his white bauneen in one of his knotty hands as if bracing himself to say something, but before the incident went any farther, Mrs. Cusack came bustling out of the room, followed by the old woman, both of them full of the subject of the beauty of the presents.

"I'm going to clean myself for the journey," Luke Cusack said, taking a pail of water, a towel, and a piece of soap out into the back premises.

After the dinner, Mrs. Cusack took Brendan Nilan aside.

"Would you care to drive with Luke to Ballyrea?" she asked.

Now, twelve strong miles on a car with cousin Luke did not appeal to Brendan Nilan. He hesitated.

"I know that Mark would take it as a great compliment for you to meet him," Mrs. Cusack added.

Suddenly Brendan Nilan's face changed. It cleared as quick as thought.

"Then I shall be delighted to go," he said at once.

But Brendan Nilan had not thought of Mark Cusack at all. Ballyrea had suddenly conjured up the memory of somebody else.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AVENUE INCIDENT.

When Brendan Nilan and Luke Cusack reached Ballyrea the car was driven into the back premises of a family named Mulvehill, who ran a shop, and who, Luke explained, were distant relatives.

"You had better hurry on to the railway station," Luke Cusack said, setting about the unharnessing of the horse.

Brendan Nilan looked at his watch. It was close on an hour before the train was scheduled to arrive.

"Do you know the way?" Luke Cusack asked. The other had the impression that he was very anxious to get rid of him.

"Yes, I'll find the road all right," he said.

He wandered up the principal street of Ballyrea, observing the row of small stores curiously. The windows were dusty, some of the wares a little more than a cemetery for dead flies, and he was again set speculating on the local prejudice against paint. Children were playing about the streets, excessively happy, grown people here and there leaned up against the corners of their doors looking as if they once—long ago—expected something to happen and had become disillusioned and drowsy in the process of waiting and hoping. A woman's face was now and again flattened against a dim window pane, her only emotion one of curiosity as to the benighted-looking wanderer who strolled by. Some

people were heard laughing in the bars of public-houses. A strolling musician was playing a cornet somewhere, the notes long-drawn out, dreary and uncertain. The sound came floating out of the deserted streets like a wail, and the irony of the song struck Brendan Nilan as he remembered the sentimental air and the words of the chorus: "Ora-ora-pro-no-o-bis." A moment later the performer having, apparently, come to the conclusion that the place was past praying for, struck up with a ring of abandon, "Has anybody here seen Kelly?"

While struck with these local impressions, Brendan Nilan was, at the same time, carefully observing the windows over the shops. He had a sort of hope that he would come upon an open one and that behind it would sit Martha Lee with her great scissors. In this he was disappointed. He could not even fix on any particular window as the one where he had seen the vision. He walked slowly to the point where he remembered the rail depôt was pitched. He had almost reached it when he paused at a gate leading down an avenue which ran parallel with the town. The light was beginning to fade, and under the trees of the avenue the shadows were deepening.

"What!" he found himself exclaiming, all his faculties alive, as he saw the figure of a girl walking slowly down this avenue. Her back was to him; the light was bad, and yet he could swear to the tall figure, the habit of clasping the hands, the grace of the movements. It was Martha Lee, and nobody else, on the top of this good earth. The girl had an unmistakable air of waiting for somebody. Could——

Brendan Nilan's eyes danced at the sudden idea that

struck him. Could she have seen his arrival on the car, guessed or heard of his mission, and thus laid herself out for him, a tempting bait?

He passed in the gate and followed her down the avenue. She never turned around until he was abreast of her. If her surprise was assumed when he accosted her he allowed that Martha Lee had some talent for the stage.

"Mr. Nilan, I declare!" she exclaimed, putting out her hand. "Why, we thought you had gone for ever as suddenly as you had come."

"You won't get rid of me as easily as you think," he said.

"I'm so sorry Ellen is not here to see you. She will be disappointed."

"Some other time, perhaps, I shall have the pleasure," he said, his eyes on the girls' face. "Well," he thought, "she does look good."

Martha Lee had stood, and there was a moment of embarrassment. She appeared to have some difficulty in making up her mind as to whether she would resume her way, accepting the young man as a chance companion as far as their road lay together.

"May I not walk along with you for a little while?" he said.

"Delighted," she said, walking on at once.

"You appeared to be in a profound meditation as I came along," he said.

"I was waiting for—a friend," Martha Lee said, hesitating before she hit on the word friend. Brendan Nilan wondered if this might be taken as something significant in relation to himself.

"How do you like Clonlea?" she asked, more briskly.

"A very pleasant place, indeed."

"Surely you find it dull?"

"No—not dull. It has interests peculiar to itself."

"What part of America did you come from?"

"New York city."

"Then you will never stick Clonlea. You will simply pine there. Even if you survive the summer, you will die from exposure in the winter."

Brendan Nilan laughed, pleased with the girl's nimble words.

"I am no butterfly," he said, "and it will take something more than climate to kill me."

"Ah!" Martha Lee exclaimed, half under her breath, her eyes straight ahead. Brendan Nilan was conscious that she had seen somebody whom she expected and whose coming was welcome to her. He looked ahead with no friendly eye.

Out of the dusk there came a figure that there was no mistaking. The hitched up shoulders, the sagging knees, the slow steps, all belonged to cousin Luke. Surely Martha Lee had seen somebody else?

Luke Cusack came up slowly to them.

"At last, Luke," Martha Lee said.

"I was de'ayed at Mulvehill's," Luke apologised as he took the girl's hand. Brendan Nilan, who was very much surprised, and very observant of all details, noted the length that Luke held the welcoming hand. The pressure was obviously hearty and the let-go reluctant.

"This is Mr. Brendan Nilan, a friend of mine," Martha said, her eyes rather merry as she introduced the American. Brendan Nilan's smile was rather forced.

Luke Cusack did not smile at all, he simply glued his smouldering eyes for a moment on his cousin.

"Luke and I are cousins—first cousins—it is with his people in Clonlea I have come to stay," Brendan Nilan said.

"Now, how remarkable," Martha Lee exclaimed. "It occurred to me at first, of course, but I forgot to ask."

Brendan Nilan thought, "She knew jolly well, and she's a very good actress, indeed."

He thought he had never seen a more ill-matched pair of companions than Martha Lee and Luke Cusack. They appeared to have absolutely nothing in common. The girl was clever. She had a nimble wit. She was distinguished looking, and must be conscious of it. He imagined that she knew her power of attraction very well. How on earth could she take any earthly interest in a man like Luke Cusack? He lacked brains, he lacked manners, he had not even a decent physique. And yet this very fine girl had been walking up and down an avenue awaiting the tardy coming of this agricultural curiosity. The little flattery that Brendan Nilan had offered his own personal attraction when he assumed that she might have been laying herself out for him had taken a very nasty turn. The sudden feeling that he was in the way, that he had blundered into a delicate situation, that it lay with cousin Luke to warn him off, gave him an ugly sensation of sudden deflation.

"The train ought to be in any minute," Luke Cusack said pointedly, his eyes in the direction of the railway station.

"You are expecting your brother?" Martha Lee inquired.

"Yes," Luke replied. "Will you go down before me?" he said bluntly to his cousin. "I have something private to say to Miss Lee."

"As crudely put as heart could desire," Brendan Nilan thought. He would have retired there and then with the best grace if he had not noticed that Miss Lee's eyes were eclipsed by her drooping lids, and that her toe beat a stone on the road with impatience. He knew that mannerism. She was irritated. At what? At whom?

"You don't worry," Brendan Nilan said to cousin Luke. "I've observed that train and that show down at the depôt for the two days I've resided in Ballyrea, and you bet cousin Mark won't be shot out of it like a catapult. A tortoise would get him all right.

Luke Cusack's pale face faded into a sickly green in the faint light. He glowered at his cousin. Martha Lee laughed in a soft voice.

"Luke has always something private to say at the eleventh hour," she said.

"I daresay the things said at the eleventh hour are always the things that are best remembered," Brendan Nilan said.

"I don't know about that," Martha Lee rejoined. "For some people all things are remembered as if they were said at the eleventh hour." Her voice was soft: she fingered a little trinket that hung on a thin gold chain about her neck.

"Is that also your opinion?" Brendan Nilan said, appealing to his cousin, his impulse purely provocative.

"Don't be bothering me," Luke replied. He turned his back on Brendan Nilan and laid his hand on Martha Lee's arm. Now, Brendan Nilan noticed that Luke

Cusack could be almost agreeable when he spoke to Martha Lee. The manner in which he laid his hand on her arm was almost gentle, reverent, and at the same time affectionate. Martha Lee did not resent it in the least.

"We are going for a walk," Luke added, his tone a dismissal to his cousin. Brendan Nilan smiled and coolly lit a cigarette.

"Before we go," said Martha Lee, "I should tell you——"

Martha Lee paused, looking quickly at Luke. He had evidently tightened his grip of her arm.

"Oh, it won't take a minute to tell," she said. Her tone and manner had suddenly become that of a grown person who found it necessary to smooth away a childish controversy.

"I should tell you," she went on, "that Ellen Noonan, myself, and a few other friends, are getting up a little picnic on the lake. We'll have tea on an island, and we would be very glad if you and Luke could join us."

"I shall be delighted," Brendan Nilan said at once.

"We're very busy at home these times spreading dung," Luke Cusack said.

"Beautifully expressed," Brendan Nilan thought.

"We shall let you know when we fix the date," Martha Lee added. "Good-bye, Mr. Nilan, I hope you will enjoy yourself in Ireland."

"I hope I shall," he said, looking directly at her. He took the proffered hand, and added as he pressed it, "I guess I'll do my best to enjoy Ireland. Good-bye."

He raised his hat, and bowed with an old-world courtesy. It won a brilliant smile from Martha Lee, her eyes aglow in the faint light.

Brendan Nilan walked on to the railway station while Luke Cusack went in the opposite direction with Martha Lee. It was a disposition of forces that did not in the least appeal to the American. He smoked his cigarette in quick little puffs, then suddenly took it from his mouth, struck it viciously to the ground, sending a flash of sparks about. His steps grew slower. His spirits drooped steadily. His thoughts were phrased in little stabs, and ran something like this: "Cashiered, by gum, cashiered. . . . Sent sprawling off the track on the preliminary lap. . . . Slipped my trolley on the first trip. . . . Keel turned skyward on the maiden voyage. . . . Before the sound of the gong had subsided in the first round, cousin Luke wafted me the sleep draught. . . . Cousin Luke, of all the generations of men."

Although the phrasing ran in that vein, the stabs were nevertheless sharp. As his depression grew he stood, looking down the dim avenue, the branches of the trees overhead looking like great ghostly hands spread out in solemn warning. The figures of his cousin and Martha Lee were gone out of sight, swallowed up in the gathering shadows. The feeling of depression incraesed. "One of my little lapses again," he told himself, his melancholy so great that he held on to the bars of the gate, and for some moments felt so sick that he thought he should vomit.

"I hope the air of Ireland will do better than this for me," he thought. "I don't want to become neurotic and I don't want to die young."

A car rattled past him on its way down to the railway station. A bell rang somewhere down at the end of the avenue, and he remembered that there was a monastery

there. The monks were being called to *Complin.* He walked slowly into the railway station and paced up and down the deserted platform. By the time a little life began to stir in the place the attack of melancholia had almost spent itself.

Luke Cusack came into the station uncouth, lumbering as a bear in his gait, a little before the train arrived.

"You weren't long waiting," he said, his expression unconcerned, his tone indifferent.

"No," the other said. They walked up and down together, the relations between them uncertain. Luke Cusack yawned once or twice. Brendan Nilan began to whistle softly.

"She's late," Luke Cusack said," looking down the railway line.

"No—never," the other said, ironically.

They walked on together for another minute.

"Look here, Nilan," Luke Cusack said, suddenly, his tone thoroughly cranky, "I want you to understand one thing."

"Cough it right up," the other said, impatiently.

"I want you to understand that you're to say nothing to Mark nor to anyone at home about Martha Lee and me. Do you understand me now?"

Brendan Nilan stood. They were directly in the yellow ray of light from a lamp that a porter had just lighted. He stood facing his cousin, his attitude decisive.

"I don't understand your tone," he replied. "If you mean this as a threat, which it sounds, you may go be damned."

The vigour of the reply, the animation of the face of

the frail-looking American, seemed to take Luke Cusack by surprise. He regarded his cousin with a new interest, so surprised to hear him deliver such a sharp retort that he hedged a little, trying to grasp a new situation. Before he had time to say anything, a bell rang and the train came crawling into the station, a small group of people on the platform looking as if they were very much surprised to see it.

There were only a few passengers aboard. Brendan Nilan drew back a little way while Luke Cusack went up to meet the only passenger who stepped briskly from his carriage. This passenger carried a heavy overcoat on his arm, and he walked with the little sway—almost lurch—of a man of energy. This was cousin Mark. Brendan Nilan was struck with the greeting—or rather lack of greeting—between the brothers. They did not shake hands, or even nod at each other or smile. Mark said: "Did you bring the car?"

"I have it in Mulvehill's," Luke replied. They came along in silence until they reached the spot where Brendan Nilan stood.

"This is cousin Brendan," Luke said. "He arrived last night."

Mark Cusack, who was walking on, did not appear to catch the words. "What are you saying?" he asked, without turning back.

Brendan Nilan thought, "Mark is as good as Luke—they're chips of the one block."

Luke repeated his laconic announcement of the American's arrival. The American was beginning to feel that he was very small apples indeed.

"What!" Mark Cusack cried, suddenly wheeling

around, his manner changed "Is this the American?" His two hands went out to Brendan Nilan's one hand.

Brendan Nilan smiled as well as he could, held back his emotion as well as he could, while the agony of the greeting lasted. Mark Cusack's face all eagerness and welcome as he looked into his face. At last Brendan Nilan could hold out no longer.

"Great Scott!" he cried, "you'll make a hash of my hand."

Mark Cusack let the hand go with a laugh, slipped his arm through that of his cousin, and they came out of the railway station linked

CHAPTER VII.

MARK CUSACK'S ARRIVAL.

HALF-AN-HOUR later the three cousins were seated at tea in a room in Mulvehill's, where they put up the car. The woman of the house, a stout, hospitable party, on learning that there was a young American in question, insisted on spreading her cloth.

As soon as they got into the light, Brendan Nilan had a long look at Mark Cusack. His first impression was one of a man full of vitality, healthy in mind and body. In all Mark Cusack's movements there was a suggestion of latent strength. His features were very like, in shape and outline, those of the old woman in Clonlea, his small, even white teeth showing every time he smiled, his complexion swarthy, his hair, thick and close cut on a well-poised well-shaped head, as black as that of his mother. There was to Brendan Nilan a remote but strange likeness to his own mother in Mark Cusack's appearance. The eyes were frank, alive, and there was a general sense of quick intelligence about the man much to Brendan Nilan's liking. Already he was conscious that the newly-arrived cousin had a good deal of personality. As he sat beside Luke at the other side of the table the difference between the brothers was very marked and yet there was that indefinable something—that link of the blood—which gave them something in common. Luke appeared ill-at-ease, fidgeting and im-

patient throughout the repast. At the first opportunity he stood up and said: "I have some commands to get in the shops for home. Will you harness the mare?"

"Yes," Mark answered.

"Pick me up on the Western road," Luke said going out, "I don't want to be hawking the parcels back here again."

Mark Cusack strolled to the fire, put his back to it, prepared to fill his pipe with tobacco, and at the same time had a quiet study of the American.

"Don't you think you were a damn fool to come to this country?" he asked suddenly.

"Only four days arrived," Brendan Nilan replied, raising four fingers of a very white hand. Mark Cusack's eyes took in that white hand with some intentness.

"Aren't four days more than enough?" he asked.

"No."

"Well," Mark Cusack said, striking a match, "the gilt will be soon rubbed off the gingerbread for you. It goes pretty fast in this country."

"The same thing might be said of other countries."

"But this damn country is not like any country under the stars."

"I am hoping that is so."

"It is a piece all to itself."

"I am almost convinced that you are correct. I was afraid it would be very like a piece of somewhere else."

Mark Cusack paused, looking more attentively at his cousin, then smiled. Brendan Nilan leaned across the table, his gaze direct and compelling.

"How long will it take me to learn agriculture—to become a farmer?" he asked, earnestly.

Mark Cusack looked down at the frail figure of the American, his expression a mixture of amusement and compassion. He took the pipe out of his mouth.

"You have asked me a strange question," he said, slowly, "and one hard to answer."

"Why should it be difficult to answer?"

"Because some people can become farmers fast enough—if they have the opportunity—and others never. There are so many kinds of farmers that anyone at all could become a sort of farmer; there are so few good farmers that hardly anyone ever becomes one."

Brendan Nilan drummed the table with his fingers, reasoning out as well as he could a not very lucid proposition.

"How long does it take, anyhow?" he asked, anxious to get something definite.

"As to the length it takes," Mark Cusack replied more deliberately—"that is even a more difficult thing to say. There is no time limit at all to farming. You can go on learning for ever and for ever, world without end."

"Then the sooner I start the better," Brendan Nilan said with decision.

"I don't believe you will ever do any more than start."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I believe it."

"But your reasons—give your reasons."

Mark Cusack shrugged his shoulders, half closing his eyes for a moment—a mannerism (but in a more extreme form) of the habit of his own mother and Mark's mother in dropping the lids over the eyes at add moments.

"You have not the cut of a farmer," Mark Cusack said.

Brendan Nilan was puzzled. He did not quite grasp the objection. "Cut? There is surely no particular cut for a farmer? Now look at Luke and yourself. Why, you are a contrast!"

"I mean you have not the strength for it," Mark Cusack said.

Brendan Nilan rose and walked over to his cousin.

"I would like you to know this," he said. "I have had something approaching a physical breakdown. I still suffer from little lapses. But I want you to realise that for all that I am real gritty. I have the peculiarity of the family—I have often heard mother speak of it—for vitality, for seeing things right through. Don't worry about my strength."

"It would not be right to set you at farming," Mark Cusack said, more vehement than he was before. "I think you are a very clever lad—from your letters and all that—and you should put your brains to something that requires brains."

"But surely agriculture—a science—requires brains?"

"Where's the use of talking that way? You were not born nor intended to go on the land. God Almighty! —look at me—look at Luke—look at that hand of yours and look at mine! There are rivers of blood between us!"

Mark Cusack had taken the slender white hand of his cousin in his own brown fist for a moment and dropped it again.

Brendan Nilan did not, however, again quite grasp

the drift of his reasoning. He took cousin Mark too literally.

"Rivers of blood between us!" he exclaimed. "Why, your mother and my mother are sisters. The old woman in Clonlea is as near to me as she is to you. We are on a dead level of blood by going back two generations."

"I know all that," Mark broke in. "Sure everyone ought to know that farmers are born, not made."

"I don't believe a bit of it," Brendan Nilan declared. "That's a superstition, a heresy."

Here Mrs. Mulvehill bustled into the room to inquire after the comfort of her guests and to take another full of her motherly eye of the stranger who was, she was proud to say, "a friend of her own and the dead spit of a Mulvehill." When she went out again, Mark said: "We'll be talking about farming some other time. There is no hurry about it at all." And Brendan Nilan had for the time being to be content.

When the car swerved into the western road they found Luke waiting there.

The night was now upon them, and it was dark in the place, but in the rays of the light thrown out by the car lamps Brendan Nilan observed a figure making good its way into the gloom. The figure was that of a girl. From the direction of her flight he concluded that the girl was with Luke and that she fled at the approach of the car. It required no extraordinary powers of deduction to know who the girl was. Brendan Nilan bit his lip, a little nettled and a little angry because Martha Lee should be a party to these clandestine meetings and consent to efface herself—to run like a criminal—to suit Luke Cusack's peculiar outlook. What was she afraid of?

Why should Luke wish to keep her existence a secret from Mark and those at home? What did she see in the fellow, anyhow? He remembered that she was once or twice in the avenue inclined to make fun, even to join in ridicule, of Luke Cusack. He should expect that to be her attitude, but she had that streak of the actress in her, he told himself, which, no doubt, helped her to give Luke the illusion that she took his attentions seriously. These thoughts rattled through his mind as he felt conscious that Martha Lee was in the neighbourhood. Mark Cusack was so occupied with his reins that he did not observe the retreat. As the car pulled up, Brendan Nilan raised his hat in the direction of the dimly seen figure. He was not quite sure, but he fancied that a white hand waved back a greeting from the darkness.

"You drive," Mark said briefly to Luke as he jumped from his seat. Luke made no reply, but put some parcels into the well of the car. Mark took down one of the overcoats from the seat.

"Is this yours?" he asked Brendan Nilan.

"Yes; help me on. I'll give you the quarter again." Mark was examining the coat critically in the light of the lamp.

"It's a poor substitute for a night like this. The wind coming down from Slieve Gurm would whip the Yankee cotton out of it in one decent blast. Try the native article." And he held up his own great frieze coat.

"But where do you come in?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"You don't imagine I'm going to wear a coat—a fellow that was brought up with the curlews in Clonlea?"

Mark Cusack asked. "Here, get into it. You've got to do what you're told in this country."

Brendan Nilan got into the coat, and Mark Cusack made him as comfortable as he could with a rug.

"My, I do feel good," Brendan Nilan said. He had been suffering from little shivers the whole evening, from the sharpness of the air. Mark Cusack sat up on the seat beside him. There was a swish through the air, down came the whip across the shoulders of the horse. It was followed by a second and a third stroke, one more vicious than the other. The animal backed, reared, and danced about the road. Brendan Nilan gripped the rail of the car, his heart thumping.

"What are you thinking of?" Mark Cusack's voice roared across the car at Luke. There was no reply from Luke. His hands swayed back and forth with the reins, sawing at the mouth of the prancing animal. His face was straight ahead, his expression grim. Luke was in a temper. The mare suddenly went off at a gallop, but gradually he toned her down to a good, spanking trot. Mark Cusack grumbled under his breath, and they went on for some time in silence.

"Who won the law case?" Luke asked at last in a sulky voice.

"Nally," said Mark, "but Driscoll is going to appeal."

"To appeal?"

"Yes; they'll go to the King's Bench with it now."

"Up to Dublin?"

"Aye."

"What is this law suit about?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"What would it be about but land," Mark Cusack said. "If you went down to hell and opened up the heart of the first Connachtman you met the word you would find written there would be 'land.'"

"But this case?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"Brings out the point very well," Mark Cusack said.

He lit his pipe and entertained his cousin with an account of the land case which had brought him as a witness to Galway. There was a strip of sand in the centre of the river below the bridge at Clonlea. On this strip of sand some grass sprang up one day. It developed and covered over most of the sand heaped up there by the action of the water. On the river bank lived a herd. He put a goat out to graze on this river estate. "But there is nothing constant in this world," said Mark Cusack, and in course of time the drift of the river shifted and threw the estate a little more to the opposite bank where lived another herd. This herd put out a goat of his own to graze on the spot and the trouble began. All the wisdom of the countryside, or the arbitration of the parish could not settle the title of the contending herds to what came to be known as Goatee Island. Their wives and their ducks and their hens and their children became involved in the quarrel. "The two goats could not agree no more than their masters," said Mark Cusack, "and I often stood on the bridge looking at them pucking and spiking each other such times as their tempers got the better of them. I forget how many goats were sacrificed by killing or drowning in the contentions, but they were many. One time I thought I had a partial settlement of the case; I advised the two herds to spancel the goats by the necks so that

they could not be destroying each other the way they were. It was no use. One said if he consented that would establish and recognise the right of the other man's goat to be there. The other herd said, 'Never! If my goat has got good, hot blood and pucks the daylights out of the other trespassing marauder I'll be better pleased with her than if she kicked down a star from the sky.'

"At last the law began. They issued a sheaf of summonses against each other, went before the magistrates, and hired the best game cocks—called lawyers—they could afford. The magistrates had no jurisdiction. The question of title put the case beyond the power of their brains.

"Well things could not be left at that. The herds went into the County Court. It was very hot weather, and the court was crowded and badly ventilated. His Honor the Judge suffered from sluggish liver, and he went asleep while they were thrashing out the case. When he woke up he decided in favour of Driscoll. Nally, the other man, swore a mighty oath, and appealed. The case came up at the Assizes to-day and was tried by a judge in a splendid robe, who wrote some letters while they were having it out. When he had his correspondence finished he hitched himself up on to his chair, began to bark on the bench, and I was told he was reversing the decision of the court below. The next round will be fought out in the King's Bench in the decent city of Dublin, and when that is done the two Clonlea herds will be beggared for the rest of their natural lives."

When they reached Clonlea there was a crowd of people

waiting in the dark on the road outside Cusack's house. They rose up out of the ditches and surrounded the car.

"Who won the case, Mark?" many voices called out.

"Nally, but Driscoll is going to appeal."

There was a hoarse laugh. Then a voice said:

"Devil a fear of him to appeal at all. It won't do him any good now."

"Why not?"

"Because there was a great spring tide this early morning. It came gushing and raging up the river on the flow, and went back whipping and tearing on the ebb. It took Goatee Island clean and clever from its legs, and it's out in the middle of the Atlantic—goats and all—by this time."

There was another laugh, then the people went chatting and shouting to their homes, all enjoying themselves very much.

"They're satisfied now when the thing has ended in a flourish," said Mark as they turned into the yard, the figure of Dominick standing beside the open gate, looking like a fantastic gargoyle on the masonry in the dim light.

"Mark!" Mrs. Cusack's voice called out from the house, "hurry up. There's a letter waiting here all day for you. And bring Brendan along quick."

"I'm coming, mother," Mark Cusack called back as he hurried into the house.

Brendan Nilan held back, watching Luke unyoking the mare. He had an impulse to wind up the day by establishing a more friendly relationship with Luke Cusack. He told himself that, after all, Luke Cusack was at bottom a simple fellow, obeying crude impulses

and primitive in his ways. He might turn out to be a passable character on closer acquaintance. But a scowl on Luke Cusack's face, seen in the light of the lantern held for him by Dominick, caused Brendan Nilan to stand hesitating where he was in the shadows behind the car. Luke Cusack paused suddenly in the looping up of one of the traces and stared blankly at Dominick.

"And I can tell you this," Luke said, with vehemence, "that I don't give a tinker's damn for all the jumped-up rotten Yanks that ever stood in shoe leather."

Dominick looked at Luke Cusack, half afraid and half amazed, but as Luke, without any more ado, went on with his work, Dominick accepted the sudden outburst with a grin.

Brendan Nilan slipped away, shrugging his shoulders, concluding that cousin Luke was not in an approachable mood. When he reached the kitchen he was at once aware that something serious occupied the attention of the family. Mark Cusack was standing near a lamp on the window folding up a letter which he had just read. The old woman was in her seat by the fire. Mrs. Cusack, her face thoughtful, her attitude one of preoccupation, was leaning with her hands on the table. No notice was for a while taken of the entrance of Brendan Nilan, so engrossed were the trio.

"What do you think yourself, Mark?" Mrs. Cusack was saying.

"There's a chance of a sale this time," he replied. "It all depends."

"The thing is," Mrs. Cusack said, "will all the tenants agree? If they don't, there can be no sale."

"Sara," said the old woman, her expression so ani-

mated that it astonished Brendan Nilan, "Sara, that is not the thing at all. The thing is, are we to get back the grab?" She rose from her seat, her face so vehement that it looked like a challenge when she turned it to Mark. Mark smiled a little as he glanced at the old woman, his face strangely like her own.

"That is settled long ago," he said. "There can be no sale except the grabbed lands on the estate are restored."

"Very well," the old woman said, sitting down again. "If that be so, let you go into the business with the people. Do no rash thing, and while listening to the word of every man, don't put too much trust on those with glib tongues."

"She is speaking like old Polonius," thought Brendan Nilan.

"And, maybe," the old woman said, her voice a little broken, "and, maybe, I'd live myself to see the upland under your plough." Mark Cusack turned to Brendan Nilan. "We are getting shut of the landlord," he said. "This estate is about to be sold. In other words, we are about to buy out our farms."

"That is to say, you are about to become peasant proprietors of the land," Brendan Nilan said. He looked at the three people, more conscious than they were themselves of the evolution through which they were passing, his instinct keener for the atmosphere of the place and the event.

"Yes, we will soon be peasant proprietors of the land, as you say," Mark Cusack said, his tone quiet. The old woman moved round in her seat, and, regarding Brendan Nilan with a gentle look, said: "Child of grace, what

can you know of such things, brought up as you were at the other end of the earth?"

"We follow things Irish in New York pretty closely," Brendan Nilan answered. "I have some idea of the buying up of the estates. And I have often heard my mother speak of the grab—the land that was lost in the hot days."

"These negotiations may come to nothing yet," Mark Cusack said. "They broke down once before. Now they are to be renewed. The agent wants to meet the tenants and talk the whole thing over."

"The State supplies the purchase money?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"Yes," Mark replied.

"The landlord is handed over the purchase money in bulk?"

"He is."

"You pay back the State by annuity until the debt is cleared?"

"Quite so."

"When the purchase money is paid up the land is yours?"

"Yes, free of rent."

"How long does it take you to clear off the purchase debt?"

"Sixty-eight and a half years."

"The Government have floated a special stock to raise the purchase money, I understand?"

"Right again."

"What security have they from you?"

"They have the land and the taxes of Ireland as security. They can sue me or any other tenant for the

debt if I am a defaulter in the matter of my annuities."

"Then the Government stand in the position of money-lenders in this transaction?"

"Exactly, with very good bonds as security."

"What interest do they charge you on the money advanced?"

Mark Cusack hesitated. "That I could not tell you," he said. As a matter of fact, he had been surprised at the manner of Brendan Nilan's questions. "Let us sit down in the sitting-room while we are waiting for something to eat," he said. "I'll tell you all I know about land-fighting, land-making, and land-buying."

When they left the kitchen, the old woman turned to Mrs. Cusack. "Did you hear that for a cross-examination, Sara?" she asked. "I tell you that is a knowing lad."

"They are reared very sharp in America," Mrs. Cusack replied.

"I declare to you that white-faced lad that come up out of the sea to us," said the old woman, "has a finer knowledge of such transactions than the boy, Luke, who will be spreading manure to-morrow."

Mrs. Cusack was shaking out the leaves from the teapot. "Ah!" she said, "I don't like lads that are too old-fashioned."

When Luke was informed of the conversation later, his narrow eyes fired. "What was Mark thinking of to satisfy his curiosity for?" he asked. "I told you before there's something at the back of all this."

Next day Brendan wrote some letters, and a few days later a bundle of books came to him. Their arrival created a sensation in the house. So many books had

never arrived there before. The first Sunday he spent in Clonlea, Mark Cusack urged him to accompany Maurteen Conneely and himself on a sail in the sea. He declined. He wanted to read, he said, and idle all the day. Most of the day he spent squatted under a stone wall on the hill reading a blue-covered document. Luke Cusack roamed about the place unnoticed, his eyes on the American, his movements uneasy, his manners suspicious. Brendan Nilan was so absorbed in his own thoughts that when he stood up at last he left the blue-covered document behind him under the wall. Luke Cusack went quietly to the spot and took it up. He snorted as he read the title: "The Land Purchase (Ireland) Act, 1903."

Luke Cusack looked down at the house, snug in the bevy of trees near the road.

"By the Almighty!" he said under his breath, "that American is on our tracks like a red-skin!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BRENDAN NILAN STARTS WORK.

When Brendan Nilan made up his mind in America to come to Ireland he decided to turn his attention to agriculture, because, according to all accounts, it was an agricultural country. He had been told by the sons of farmers who had emigrated from Ireland, to follow various occupations in the States—from parquetry floor layers to crack lawyers—that the farming he would learn in Ireland "would be damn bad farming." Others were more hopeful; they spoke of new conditions, of land purchase, agricultural development, co-operative methods. These hopefuls were in a minority, but they had the faith of missionaries. Brendan Nilan put one set of opinions against the other, and reckoned that there was, at all events, in Ireland a good enough field for a very raw prospector like himself. He would rely on his own intelligence to make the best of whatever openings presented themselves to him. The life had, moreover, an attraction for him, forced as he was to abandon other ambitions for reasons of health. He had the training and outlook of an American; an acceptance of failure in one direction with some cheerfulness and a determination to go out after a success somewhere else, was part of the philosophy in which he had been brought up.

Conservatism on the part of his people in Clonlea he had been prepared for; all the suspicious touches and evidences of hostility on the part of Luke Cusack he took

as part of that conservatism. The crude petulancy of his cousin he also put down to his upbringing in a primitive environment. Nevertheless it irritated him.

Brendan Nilan was a worshipper of Walt Whitman and his spirit; he would often look up from the pages of "Leaves of Grass," his mind filled with the sweep, the glory of the love of human brotherhood that Whitman sang, to find himself confronted with some half-understood, underground bickering that Luke Cusack advertised by sulky looks and moping ways. The fact that Brendan Nilan and Mark Cusack had found a very great many interests in common, that they realised at once that they had a great many things to teach each other, and that already at the back of it all was growing a strong natural friendship, only appeared to make Luke Cusack more disagreeable.

Between the brothers, the new arrival soon found out, there was no friendship, not to speak of affection. There was never any conversation between them; a short question and a brief answer sufficed in the business of their daily occupation. At times of little crises in their work on the farm, when it became necessary for authority to assert itself as between one and the other, Mark Cusack spoke with a quick directness that was foreign to him at other times.

Luke Cusack accepted this authority in a spirit of putting a duty to Mark rather than as an act of his own submission. Brendan Nilan often felt himself involved in these family irritants; his natural liking for Mark seemed like an act of censure of Luke, and Luke had a perfect knack of always exaggerating it in that sense. Brendan Nilan loved good comradeship, frankness, and

openness in his relations with all the family. He found Luke Cusack a very stubborn proposition in the domestic economy of Clonlea, so much so that after a little futile experimenting he reduced the whole thing to an occasional contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

When Luke Cusack heard that Brendan Nilan desired to work like any other farm hand on the holding, he laughed hoarsely, scoffed and snorted. The thing to him appeared so outrageous that he could only express his feelings by these elemental methods. The old woman and Mrs. Cusack were also opposed to the proposal, mostly on the grounds that Brendan Nilan's health would not bear the strain, but, too, because they inwardly regarded one brought up and educated like the American as too good or too "grand" for agriculture, and that he would be so much foreign matter in the business of the farm.

They said, "Sure the delicate handful of a fairy never turned a green sod in his life, the creature. God help his foolish head." Even Mark Cusack was sceptical, and put him off as long as he could.

In the end Brendan Nilan felt that he should have to put up a fight for his plans.

"I say, Mark, what do you think I came here for?" he asked directly one morning. "To be a bummer or a barnacle, which?"

Mark Cusack regarded the would-be farm pupil with sympathetic, but half quizzical eyes. "You are a very nice young fellow to look at," he replied, "and you had better not spoil yourself trudging and pushing and striving in wet clay and worse."

"Well, I can't live on admiration; I'd shrivel up if

I felt I was kept to be chirped at and praised. As a simple matter of natural history, I'm not a canary."

"But what in the name of thunder am I to do with you?" Mark Cusack asked. "You can't take a fork and come out and spread manure with the rest of us. You would soil your clothes."

Involuntarily, Brendan Nilan looked upon Mark Cusack's heavy boots, the sturdy limbs clean-cut and shapely in the grey homespun pants, the bauneen hanging loosely from the square shoulders, the tanned, hardened, strong face under the soft black hat. He contrasted it all with his own figure—the smartly-cut clothes, the immaculate collar, the gold pin in the big tie, the pair of light patent leather shoes he stood in. Mark Cusack took up one of his cousin's hands and laid it on his own palm—a white wafer resting on a leather background. Mark touched the manicured nails, pink and delicate as sea-shells, with his own fingers, sinewy and flattened at the tips from work, and he did so with the air of one who was afraid that even his rude touch might damage something that was rare and fragile.

"You're a bad substitute for the land," Mark Cusack said with conviction at last.

"Then I'll clear; I shan't waste time here," Brendan Nilan said.

Mark Cusack looked steadily at his cousin, and he knew that the words would be followed by prompt action. He saw that there was trouble in the serious face, some resentment in the thoughts of the newcomer. His own expression softened as he looked into the eyes of Brendan Nilan—quiet eyes, one might almost say lazy eyes, but with a deadly observation lurking in their

deeper drifts and shadows. Mark Cusack often told himself that this was a good face to look upon and that he was glad the American was of his own blood and race. Behind the frailty there was a spirit and a purpose and a capacity that appealed to Mark Cusack. He was frightened a good deal at the idea of the flight of this new interest from the house and the quiet life of Clonlea. He also knew the best way to counter the threatened action.

"Well, now," he said, drawling out the words in the accent of the place, giving them a ring of great simplicity, "well, now who'd ever conceit that the like of you could be so easily downed?"

"It would be waste of time to stay here if you are opposed to my working."

"Is it me to be opposed to work?" Mark Cusack asked. "Devil a fear of that."

"Then let me set to and have done with it."

"Well, if you are so bent upon it, begin at the beginning. Turn in with Dominick to the garden today. He will show you how to dig, never fear. You can go for the cows in the evening and study my mother while she milks them. When we come from the tillage in the evening you can take the horses with Dominick to the water."

"Well, that's something to start with," Brendan Nilan said. As Mark Cusack walked away from him in his swinging gait, his air one of breezy optimism, Brendan Nilan suspected that he was secretly laughing at the idea of the American becoming a farmer.

Whatever doubt Brendan Nilan had of the amusement he was affording Mark Cusack there was none whatever

when later he found himself in the garden with Dominick. The garden was a short distance to the left of the house. You passed into it through a wicket in a thick hedge. The garden was large and rambling, broken up into sections by rows of fruit trees and paths that conformed to no settled plan. There was no order about it, it was not neglected, and yet it was not cared for, but it was to the garden lover full of that charm called old-fashioned. Brendan Nilan found Dominick at work in a section of the garden that was half in grass and half in loose lumps of turned clay. Dominick recalled years later the extraordinary fact that when he looked up the American was standing exactly in the spot where a terrible event was destined to occur and to go down in the history of Clonlea.

Brendan Nilan observed that Dominick was measuring out a strip of ground with lines or rope tied to low sticks.

"That is where Mrs. Cusack wants the row of sweet pea this year," Dominick explained. "I will be digging it up now, and, indeed, it's long ago it should be done." Dominick took up his spade.

"Allow me," Brendan Nilan said. Dominick raised his freckled face, his small mouth pushed out in incredulous inquiry, looking as if he considered the proposition a joke. Then he slowly surrendered the spade to Brendan Nilan.

It was the first time in his life that the American held a spade in his hand.

"You will sow the seeds here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Dominick, whose head seemed to droop suddenly on its hinges, replied.

"How deep am I to dig?"

"A couple of spits, anyways," Dominick answered over his shoulder as he disappeared around a row of bush fruit.

Brendan Nilan had no earthly idea what "a spit" meant as a measurement. He calculated that he should go lightly into the earth, as only little seeds were required to be set there. He scratched along the line set out for him by Dominick, turned up his first scraping of wet clay. He did his business according to his conscience and his lights. In an extraordinarily short space of time by the clock he felt a trouble in the palms of his hands from the friction of the rude handle of the spade, and a stiff sensation over the hips from his exertions. He grasped the fact that digging was no mean occupation.

He sought Dominick out for further guidance. Dominick was down on his hands and knees in newly-turned clay; the American soon became conscious that Dominick was going round like the hand of a clock, his knees the fulcrum, his hinderpart the object kept pointing steadily to Brendan Nilan. The American stood looking at the peculiar body, more grotesque than ever in its new aspect. Then he became aware that Dominick was convulsed with laughter, and that he adopted this peculiar ruse to keep his face hidden from observation.

"I say, what's the matter?" he asked at last.

Dominick's body only rocked the more; the emotion increased; shocks and spasms shook his frame.

"Having a fit, I guess," Brendan Nilan commented. He sat down to await developments.

Dominick rose slowly after some time, still trying to control his features, his face red as a lobster.

"Do let us have the joke," Brendan Nilan pleaded, his tone at the same time nettled.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Dominick said, speaking with an effort.

"Oh, it's all right, old chap. Come and have a look at this sweet pea business. I've got it finished."

Dominick ploughed dutifully after Brendan Nilan to the training ground.

"Is that right?" the new hand asked.

Dominick seemed again to suffer from internal shocks and combustions as he beheld the handiwork. He planted his tremendous hands against his hulking hips. Brendan Nilan felt a sting of indignation.

"What's biting you now?" he asked, his tone nasal.

The question deprived Dominick of the power of his limbs. He sank down on his knees, then rolled over on the ground, the spasms jerking his body like sudden blasts.

"A human automobile, the exhaust pipe working overtime," Brendan Nilan said, regarding him coolly. "All you lack, my friend, is the stink."

Dominick rolled over on the other side, his condition hopeless.

"Say, if you will insist, get it over somewhere else. You'll bust, sure, and you'll make more than a grease spot, you know, old man." Brendan Nilan prodded Dominick a little with the handle of his spade. The attack eased off after some time. Dominick was shamefaced when at last he got himself under control and rose slowly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said as before.

Brendan Nilan could not resist the national weakness to deliver a brief lecture. "If I were you," he said, with a fine loss of his geographical bearings, "I'd keep that sort of thing bottled right up during business hours. Work it off when you go to the vaudeville. It will cheer up the management; they live long and strenuous lives to gain that effect. I want something else right here."

"What do you want, then, sir?"

"I want you to say if this sweet pea preparation racket is *it*," Brendan Nilan said.

"I'll soon tell you that," Dominick said. He made a lunge at the American, seized the spade, spat on his fists, and drove the spade into the earth with a sudden expert push of the powerful foot, then landed up a clean-cut sod outside the boundary line. With a certain rhythm he followed this up along the full length of the row where Brendan Nilan had scratched. He swerved round and came back down a parallel line, leaving the opening a good foot wide. Brendan Nilan followed the demonstration with intense interest.

"Now," said Dominick, "that's one spit of ground done. Get up a few more like it." And he threw down the spade.

"You're not going to bury anybody in this trench, are you?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"I am," said Dominick, with a grin. "I'm going to bury me oul' wife there, for she was a flaming rap and terrible for the drink."

"Dominick," said Brendan Nilan, "I don't like your humour; it's too fresh."

"Well," said Dominick, "that's the way you have to ready the ground for them sweet-peas. They must get the ground, and herself within will have no respect for them if they don't run up five or six feet and send out champion flowers, every petal as big and as bright as a butterfly's wing. I'll be turning in a couple of barrows of manure to that place when you have it deep enough." And Dominick disappeared again.

Brendan Nilan laboured in that neck of ground all day. The sweat stood on his brow. His back ached. White welts were already standing out on the palms of his hands. The first burst of enthusiasm for quick workmanship gave way to a steadier, more dignified, stride. The attempt to emulate Dominick's expert spade pushes was abandoned. He had to take a great many rests, finding frequent meditations—while he leaned on the handle of the spade—very interesting. All his disturbances were not, however, physical. He had mental worries as well. For he was amazed at the active life he found under the wet clay, his spade, he found, shattered in on a lot of strange beings, broke up a great number of communities, carried panic and death into family arrangements, obliterated empires. It cost his aesthetic sense something to do all this wanton damage. Once—the first time—he squirmed almost as much as the worm he ran through; but the work had to be done, all this life had to be destroyed, all the great underground schemes to be shattered, political parties summarily levelled, if Mrs. Cusack was to have her row of champion sweet-pea. He pondered—resting on his spade—the eternal problem: Does the end justify the means? Is it necessary that one should strike terror and

death to the teeming life under the sod in order that a child may clap its hands at sight of a bloom laughing in the summer sun? And yet inexorable Nature kept her great tally—for some day the bloom and the child and he, Brendan Nilan, and the very spade he wrought with —wood and steel—would be slowly covered over by the quiet grass. All of them had come from the wet clay, all of them would go back to it. Nature would keep the tally and mark it off with unerring finger.

He had only started on this promising subject—his chin over the top of the idle spade—when his aunt—blessed spirit!—hailed him with the rapturous message that the dinner was ready.

"Well," Mark said to him at the dinner, "how did you get on with Dominick in the garden?"

"Splendidly."

"You like the work?"

"Yep."

A low, croaking laugh from Luke Cusack caused the family to look at him in some surprise.

"You haven't swallowed a bone, have you?" Mark asked, sarcastically.

"I have not, in troth," Luke replied, his face long and sceptical.

"Well, then, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, sure nothing at all is the matter with me. Only I do be thinking my own thoughts sometimes." And Luke croaked again.

It was all very good and very pleasant in the old garden, and, as the days passed, Brendan Nilan hardened somewhat and found Dominick rather entertaining company. Mrs. Cusack gave him instruction in the matter

of cow milking in the morning; his initiation was startling. He was watching her closely, her capable fingers manipulating the teats with a regularity that developed into a song, when suddenly she turned the teat from the pail to his face and he got a squirt of the warm milk in the face.

"Oh, Aunt Sara, I say!" he spluttered, the milk running down his indignant face in little streams.

"Now you're baptised," Mrs. Cusack said laughingly.

In the evenings with Dominick he took the horses down to a clear stream of water that ran by the roadside under some great chestnut trees. It was the custom to take the animals to this place to lave their thirst. Brendan Nilan had never sat on a horse's back in his life until Dominick gave him the leg-up on the brute known by the name of Blackbird. He was glad that nothing more was expected of him than to walk the animal to the stream and back, putting him out to the belly in water for the good of its legs. Dominick always took charge of the younger and more capricious mare.

But only some weeks had gone by when Brendan Nilan got rather tired of walking Blackbird. He was growing ambitious. In the interval he had been made a delightful present by their neighbour, Mrs. Conneely, of a white bauneen. An itinerant tailor who turned up now and again had made him a pants of grey homespun. He had the local shoemaker to put heavy soles to his boots. He had taken French leave with a black broad-brimmed hat of Mark's. Collars and such like were relegated to state occasions. The only thing that distinguished him from the people of the place was a broad silk faded red ribbon sash that he bound about his

waist, and which he had come unexpectedly upon in his trunk. If any of his friends in New York had seen him riding Blackbird down the road in the twilight they would not know him. He guessed he looked pleasant enough to go into a picture in the movies! But it was that boy heart of his which brought him to temporary grief.

"I say, Dominick," he said, as Blackbird, the water dripping from its bit, turned for home one evening, "let's have a bit of a hippo. It's the next best thing to a blow-in that I can invent here."

"A what did you say?" Dominick inquired, leaning over the mare's haunch.

"A bit of a hippodrome," Brendan Nilan explained. The explanation left Dominick's face blank.

"I don't know what it is," Dominick said, "but if it's anything you could ate I'll chance it."

"Well, you are cute! I mean, let's have a run on the horses along the road. I'm mad to feel going."

"Oh, I have you now," said Dominick. Nevertheless he hesitated; visions of the wrath to follow should such a proceeding be discovered rose up before him. Then a look of mischief puckered the space that made up his mouth.

"Hold on, then," he cried, whipping an end of rope from his pocket and bringing it down on the flank of Blackbird.

The horse did some backing about the road, there was a little manœuvring on the part of Dominick with the mare, and again the rope found Blackbird's flank. He went down the road at a lively trot, realising that there was a change in the evening programme. The

reins did not seem much good to Brendan Nilan after that. He felt himself hopping about Blackbird's backbone and clung desperately to his mane, finding himself unaccountably breathless. The landscape became blurred, as mixed-up to his vision as a futurist painting. He was dimly aware that Dominick was making some casual observations as he trotted beside him on the mare.

Brendan Nilan made no reply, had no opinion to offer for the first time in his life. All the fun of the hippo was for Dominick. That young rascal, not satisfied, brought his end of rope into play again and they went forward at a gallop. The hopping sensation gave way to a motion made up of little pitches backward and forward. Brendan Nilan preferred it to the trot. For little spaces he was even able to enjoy the thrill of the ride. Once he shouted to Dominick, "Say, this is as good as Paris." Then Blackbird fell into his jog trot again and eventually to a walk. They wheeled about on the road.

"We'll walk them home," Dominick said. "They'd want to cool down after that sprint."

"I feel sawed to pieces," Brendan Nilan complained.

"You'll be galled to-morrow," Dominick prophesied. "It's a terrible complaint."

"Never heard of it before. How do you feel?"

"Oh, don't ask me," Dominick replied.

That night Brendan Nilan felt a bit stiff in his walk —a little spread in his gait. Next morning his head ached badly; he felt deadly sick and sore. Mark Cusack was the first to notice him.

"What is wrong?" he replied. "You're as pale as a ghost."

" I think it comes from bare backbone riding," Brendan Nilan admitted.

" Oh, is that it?" Mark Cusack said. " Well, you'd better lie down for a bit. You're galled."

Brendan Nilan lay down and kept to the bed for a few days, the attack bringing on one of his lapses of ill-health.

One day while he lay in bed, his mind working on the eternal problem of the cables looping up the pink roses on the wall-paper, the window was stealthily opened from the outside and a head came in.

" How are you, Mr. Nilan?" the voice of Dominick asked.

" Dominick," said the invalid, " I'm simply galled—don't expect me to say any more."

" It's a painful subject," said Dominick.

" It is, Dominick, a very painful subject. Leave it at that."

" But you'll be fine and hardy when 'tis over and able to ride a kangaroo without any bother."

" That will certainly be some compensation, though I don't think I shall ever straddle a kangaroo."

" Well," said Dominick, " I paid for the hippo."

" Why, what happened?"

" The strap, sir."

" What strap?"

" Mark's, sir. From off his middle he took it. He was wild. Up in the hay loft he got me. I never gave as much as one bawl out of me. Just shook meself together again, and dropped down the ladder."

" Oh, I see," Brendan Nilan replied, when he had

grasped the situation. "Were the horses injured that Mark was so angry?"

"It was not the thought of the horses that rose the temper in him at all. It was because you were knocked up. He went tearing around the place all that day, his face as black as the hob, and he swearing and lashing around him like a good fellow. I can tell you what, sir, he laid it on to me hot and heavy up in that hay loft."

"I'm sorry, Dominick, if I got you into trouble."

"Don't mention it at all. And I beg your pardon, Mr. Nilan, but what brought me was to ask you if you'd have a cure?"

Before Brendan Nilan could reply something flew across the room and landed on the bed. He picked it up. It was a little bundle of freshly-gathered dock leaves.

"Do I take these?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"Oh, Lord, no you don't take them," Dominick cried hurriedly. "You just—well, you—ah—just apply them to the place, sir."

And Dominick, having thus delicately acquitted himself on a trying occasion, disappeared.

"Brendan is getting all right again," said Mrs. Cusack to Luke that evening. "He'll be up and about to-morrow."

Luke Cusack blinked with his near eye, as he looked at his mother. "Isn't God very good to us after all?" he said, in his cranky, icy tone. "What would we do at all if anything happened to poor Brendan Nilan? He's such a simple fellow, and he came to us from such an innocent country!"

CHAPTER IX.

SOME FAMILY HISTORY.

"A saint of God might stand it," Luke Cusack told himself, and then added with grim conviction—"but I'm no saint of God."

He walked into the kitchen. His mother was completing the scouring of a churn.

"I want you without," he said.

His mother followed him along the passage into the sittingroom, wiping her hands in her apron. Luke Cusack sat down solemnly, and indicated another chair for his mother with the stem of his pipe. She sat down slowly, her expression one of expectancy.

"I often heard my grandmother tell," Luke Cusack said, "how her husband, Brendan Mulvehill, died in his prime, leaving her to look after this place with two young daughters on her hands."

"Aye," Mrs. Cusack agreed, surprise in her tone. "I was one of the daughters."

"The youngest of them," Luke corrected, "the eldest was Mary, now Mrs. Nilan, of New York city, and mother of Brendan Nilan lately come across the raging ocean."

Mrs. Cusack hitched herself nervously in her chair.

"When Mary Mulvehill emigrated," Luke went on steadily, "you were the only one left. Soon after you married Patrick Cusack."

"God have mercy on his soul," Mrs. Cusack said devoutly, then sighed.

" Amen," Luke added. He leaned across the table, smoking the while. " When my father married you," he said, " he married into the place."

" He did, indeed, Luke."

" And your mother, the old one now within in the kitchen, continued as owner of the holding?"

" She did. The deeds were in her name. The rent was always paid in her name."

" She was the boss."

" Your father never bothered to change anything. Things were going on very well as they were, but it was known on my marriage that when the old woman died my husband would be the owner. There was no one else."

" But he never became the owner because he died when Mark and myself were still young boys."

" He did die, whipped off in a draught of pneumonia, and it was five minutes past eleven he went on the twenty-ninth of March, a great loud whistling wind in the chimney, but nothing at all to the great impression that was preying upon his own chest." Mrs. Cusack spoke sorrowfully of odd events that would be always terrible to her.

" Then we grew up," Luke went on, " and, when we became big enough, got into the way of working the farm."

" You were a great blessing to myself and the old woman," Mrs. Cusack agreed. " Sure where would we be at all only for you."

" Mark now does all the business of the place," Luke Cusack said, keeping track of his subject.

" Well, of course, Mark is the oldest, and has a

great head for his business," Mrs. Cusack said; "everyone gives in to that."

"But the place still belongs to the old woman," Luke said. "The rent is still paid in her name. When we go to the bank it is her name that they take cognisance of."

"Yes, that is so. Sure we never troubled about anything like that. Aren't we very united, Luke?" Mrs. Cusack's tone was becoming troubled.

"Up to this we were united," Luke said. "We never bothered, as you say, mother. We grew up—Mark and myself—like the grass in the fields, accepting everything and believing in everything as we found it and saw it."

"No disunion, or bitterness, or ugliness among us at all," Mrs. Cusack insisted, her tone still more nervous. She was having a feeling that Luke was leading up to something that might end the family happiness. She watched his face anxiously as he went on smoking for some time. He stood up at length, went to the door, looked up and down the hall outside to see that nobody was there, carefully closed the door, and came back to his seat.

"Could you tell me this, mother," he asked in a low tone. "Has granny made a will?"

Mrs Cusack was twisting a corner of her apron around her fingers.

"I think she has, but, dear knows, I didn't like ever to question her. She wouldn't like it, and my mind was no way uneasy, and you know what she is, always accustomed to have her own way."

"I do know that," Luke agreed, with significance. "So you don't know for certain."

"Not for certain. But once, some years ago, she used to have private talks with Father Hugh Whelan of Ballyhague, and then she was within with the lawyer in Ballyrea. When she came home she said: 'Well, now, Sara, my mind is at rest and I can pray for my soul in peace.' Beyond that she did not go."

Luke Cusack knocked the heel of his pipe into the grate.

"But for what are you asking such queer questions of me, boy?" Mrs. Cusack asked.

"For my own information," Luke replied tartly.

"Is there anything weighing on your mind?" his mother asked.

"Mother," said Luke, "what do you think brought Brendan Nilan here?"

"He come for the sake of his health; sure everyone knows that."

Luke laughed a little scornfully. As he did a footstep sounded outside. A moment later Mark Cusack passed in his swinging gait by the window. They heard him go around by the back of the house, and soon his voice sounded in the kitchen, speaking to the old woman.

"Where is Nilan at the present moment?" Luke Cusack asked.

"I don't know, but I suppose he's down with the Conneelys, chaffing and disputing with Maurteen."

"He's not in this house?"

"No, he is not."

"Well, in the name of God let us know where we

are and what's going to become of the half of us," Luke said. "Come into the kitchen and I'll talk up to Mark."

"If you have a burden on your mind," Mrs. Cusack said, rising, "it is well for you to ease it if you can."

They went into the kitchen.

"It nearly took the jaw off me the other morning, that blunt it was," Mark Cusack was saying to his grandmother when the others came in. He was stropping a razor near the window.

"Luke wants to say something to us all," Mrs. Cusack announced, after a pause. "He has a matter on his mind."

Mark Cusack looked sharply at his mother, and then at Luke, but went on stropping his razor. The old woman went to her seat by the fire, Luke stood near the table, his angular figure stooping a little over it.

"Well," said the old woman, pleasantly, "I hope you have a good story for us, Luke."

"I want to know," said Luke, in his cranky voice, his eyes fixed upon Mark, "What Nilan has come to this place for."

"What Nilan are you talking about?" Mark asked, his tone hasty.

"Brendan Nilan, our cousin. What is he mixing himself up in our farm for?"

"Because he got a strange notion, and maybe a foolish notion."

"I won't have that," Luke said. He brought his bony fist down on the table. The old woman began to rock a little in her seat by the fire. Mrs. Cusack crossed to the dresser, her fingers busy again with a

corner of her apron. Mark continued putting an edge on his razor, the strokes on the strop deliberate.

"I'm not going to believe any cock-and-bull story that Nilan trots across the sea with," Luke said.

"Well, if you don't believe it, don't believe it—that's all," Mark said.

"What brought him just as the land purchase is going to take place?" Luke demanded, his face pallid and sweaty, his eyes smouldering.

Mark turned to his brother for a moment. "What are you asking me for?" he demanded. "Why don't you go and ask himself and not be skulking about after him?"

"Now, Mark," the old woman said, reprovingly, "can't you listen to what your brother has to say."

"Oh, all right, I'm listening," Mark Cusack said, going faster with the sharpening of the razor.

"How does Nilan know so much about land purchase?" Luke demanded. "What made him study it all before ever he set foot in Ireland? How is it he knows about the getting back of the grab? What anxiety has he to know all about the farm? What has him reading books about farming in the nights and what is he getting all the weeklies for? Why does he want to be a farmer? Do you think he came here for a joke or a bet or just to have a laugh at the ignorant Irish?"

"Bedad," said Mark Cusack, blandly, "that's a great string of conundrums entirely."

"What do you believe yourself?" the old woman asked of Luke.

"I believe he came here for the land?" Luke Cusack replied. "I believe he was sent here."

"Well," said Mark, with a little laugh, "if he was sent here to get the land didn't they pick out a grand tack for him?"

"It might not be so hard for him as you conceive," said Luke, hotly, "and, believe you me, he's an able dealer. The farm did not belong to our father. He only married into the place and he is a good while dead now. He only married a younger daughter. We are the children of the younger daughter. What is to stop the oldest daughter from making a claim when the land is going for sale? Hasn't she said to herself that she is the best entitled to it? I say now she has sent her son here to nose and smell about the place and to see what can be got for the Nilans. I say you have taken a viper to your bosom."

Mrs. Cusack gave a little moan of pain, the old woman began to mutter in her corner. Mark Cusack was carefully finishing the whetting of his razor by stroking it on the palm of his hand.

"God keep us from division and strife," Mrs. Cusack said.

"Why should all the land go to a younger sister?" Luke asked. "If the upland is restored to us why should she get that, too? If Mrs. Nilan stood on this floor now would she not be better entitled to call it her own than you, mother? She sent her son, she loaded him with presents—gold and silks and embroideries and attractions, and he has spread them before you as a man might who wants to mesmerise you. He has a nice, taking way with him; he wants to make himself friendly;

he has a glib tongue; he wears a bauneen like any of us; he wants to please granny above all, and when he kissed her it was with the kiss of a Judas."

The old woman rose and hobbled about the kitchen; she was muttering under her breath; she went to the dresser, ran her fingers nervously along a top shelf, took a white lozenge from a paper, and put it in her mouth. Mrs. Cusack's face was full of pain. Mark Cusack jerked a black hair from his head, raised it against the light of the window, and carefully tested the razor blade by cutting the hair.

"Fit to shave the lost tribes of Israel it is," Mark Cusack said with satisfaction."

"Sara," said the old woman, when she got back to her seat, "what do you think about what Luke says?"

Mrs. Cusack looked disturbed and miserable. "I don't know what to think at all," she said. "Sure, maybe it is that Mary changed since she went away. People sometimes get very strange when they leave home. It might be that her husband has put her up to something of the kind."

Mrs. Cusack's voice trembled. The terror of losing the land—which to the peasant mind is like unto no other terror this side of the grave—had suddenly taken hold of her.

"And you, Mark, what do you think?" the old woman asked.

"I think it's a fine evening and that it should be a good year for spuds," Mark Cusack replied.

"I'm not to be made a laugh of," Luke shouted, bending his body forward as he glowered at Mark.

"Don't try to bully me. I'll not take it from you," Mark retorted, returning the look with interest.

"Now, now," said Mrs. Cusack, leaving a hand on Luke's arm, "don't be talking that way to each other. What good can come from it at all at all? Sure there was never an angry word heard in this house above all the houses in the world."

"I want no talk at all," Mark Cusack said. "This place is still the place of Margaret Mulvehill."

The old woman, Margaret Mulvehill, rose at the fireplace. She reached out her arms to them, her face strangely animated.

"Sure if this place be mine," she said, "you are all my children. God gathered you all under my wing for some good reason of His own—you, Sara, and Mary who is in America; Mark, and you, Luke, and the child, Brendan, who has sought the friendship of our roof. You are all my children, my blood and my care. Can it be that you will know a difference or a discord? What difference should there be among you no more than between the waiting seeds lying in the one pod? Luke, boy, you have a troubled mind and you are given to a brooding upon it. That is no good thing. Don't bring the habit of the angry look, or the stinging word or the stir of hatred, into this house."

"By the Almighty, I'm right," Luke Cusack cried, his excitement increasing. "You have heard it now for yourself, mother. The place is still in the hands of Margaret Mulvehill. She knows nor sees no difference between those who have slaved on the farm all their lives and those who walked across her threshold the other day. We are only two waiting seeds in the one

pod, ourselves and the Nilans. One is the same as the other. Nilan has already wormed his way into her mind. He'll ripen in the pod quicker than Mark Cusack. I'm thinking some of us will find ourselves in the stubble when the harvest is reaped."

"You are talking like a foolish boy," the old woman said, shaking her head, her expression one of sadness rather than anger as she beheld Luke.

"We are on a level with the Nilans to-day," Luke said vehemently. "To-morrow they will be in front of us. They will be the eldest branch—Brendan Nilan will sound very near to Brendan Mulvehill in the half-wandering mind of an old woman. The Cusacks were a pack of fools and they'll get the fool's reward. This place will be willed over to the Nilans in the heel of the hunt."

Mrs. Cusack commenced to weep quietly, applying her apron to her eyes. The old woman fumbled with her stick, her agitation increasing. She rose and hobbled about, muttering to herself. She went into her bedroom, rattling the door with her stick.

"She can't deny it," Luke said, looking after her. "I can tell you I have a hold of the right story."

"It's a great thing to boast about—to frighten an old woman," Mark Cusack said bitterly. The old woman came back to the kitchen again, smoothing back her grey locks under her cap with her hand, nervous and agitated.

"You want to bring strife into this house," she said to Luke, "you and your foolish words."

"Maybe now you could say something to him that would put his mind at rest," Mrs. Cusack said to her

mother, her eyes already red-rimmed, her expression now one of utter misery.

"Very well," said the old woman, "I will say something—I'll say words that I thought would never be demanded of me by anyone in this house. I'll tell you a thing that I thought you would have no occasion to know until I had gone from this place for ever. My will is made and it lies with the deeds and the papers in the lawyer's office."

"Ah," Luke Cusack exclaimed involuntarily, his face one of fanatical curiosity and concern.

"By my will," said the old woman, "this place and all it contains goes to my grandson, Mark Cusack, with provisions as to how he must provide for his mother as long as she lives. All goes to Mark because I know he will always do what is just and that he will wrong no man or no woman. When I made that will I believe that God in His mercy directed me to the best. A line or a word, no matter who comes or who goes, will never know change or alteration.

Mrs. Cusack dried her eyes. The sweat stood out in beads on Luke's forehead. Mark put the razor in its case and closed it carefully.

"I hope we are all satisfied now," Mrs. Cusack said.

Luke made a movement drawing his limbs together. "What provision is made for me?" he demanded. His voice sounded dry.

"You are a second son," said the old woman, turning on him with some spirit. "You will be marrying into another farm and when we see what kind of a place you will be getting we will tell you what provision will be made for you. Let that knowledge content you."

Luke Cusack's tongue ran round his lips, moistening them for they had become hot and dry. A light shone in his near eyes giving him the appearance of being almost crooked-eyed. A feeling of having every hand in the place raised against him and a blind prejudice that the American would rob him of everything, overpowered him. The words of the old woman about his marriage as a second son swung his mind on to a more intimate and personal subject and the feeling now that Brendan Nilan was winning all along the line sprung on him a most appalling dread. Some drops of sweat fell from his narrow forehead.

"I want to know one thing more," he said, after a pause. "It is said that you are bringing Brendan Nilan to the conference with the agent about buying the land. Is that true?"

"It is true," Mark Cusack replied quietly.

"Very well," Luke said. He made a movement to leave the kitchen.

"Step out and put a few arms of hay down to the horses," Mark said, assuming his ordinary tone of direction, but with something of an added authority and sharpness. "I told you to do it an hour ago."

Luke Cusack hesitated for a moment. He seemed as if he were going to refuse the order, to defy the other, then paused, gave a little snort, and walked out of the kitchen.

"You'll have trouble with that fellow yet, Sara, remember my words," the old woman said when he had gone.

"Ah, musha, sure the creature has no harm in what he says, only to be anxious about the place and the

standing of the family," Mrs. Cusack pleaded. "Isn't that a true word, Mark?"

"Mother," said Mark, "will you hold your tongue and get me a sup of hot water? I came in to have a shave."

On his way out of the house Luke Cusack turned into the sittingroom and took from it pen, ink, and some notepaper. In the stable he lighted a lanthorn and then mounted the ladder with the missing rungs to the hay loft overhead. Here he was alone. No light showed in the place except the little pool of yellow flame from the lanthorn on the boards. Luke Cusack lay down flat on his stomach, swept the boards of some hay seeds with the sleeve of his coat, put the paper before him on the cleared space and still pallid, fresh perspiration coming out over his temples, laboured at the writing of a letter to Martha Lee.

CHAPTER X.

IN MARTHA LEE'S BEDROOM.

MARTHA LEE was suffering from an attack of "the blues," a malady to which dwellers in small towns are very prone. She adopted the traditional cure of a brisk walk into the open country. It did her no earthly good. Everything she saw was dull, grey, tame, dead. She gazed with tired eyes at the scenery. Its loneliness appalled her. She met only one human being on the road, a man who walked behind a cow. Both the man and the cow appeared to have fallen into a dream. They moved along the road, keeping a sort of dragging step, not really live or conscious things. Once the cow stood, and the man, perforce, stood, too. The beast looked foolishly about it with heavy eyes, and, satisfied that there was really nothing else for it, moved on again. The man just moved on after the cow in a sort of stupor, his intelligence roused enough to keep him slavishly in the wake of a dirty tail.

Martha Lee went forward with a spurt, determined to shake off the deadly inertia of this life. After two hundred yards or so she began to lag, got more depressed than ever, and returned to Ballyrea, resolved to have a thoroughly good talk with some neighbour, to gossip, to tear every shred of character from the first person whose name was "drawn across the coals," and to save her life by an orgy of scandalous backbiting! But by the time she got back to Ballyrea the desire for gossip

had gone. She slowly passed by several shops which she knew from experience to be rich in promise—sources from which the hot lava of scandal ever flowed. She turned in her own door. Her mother was leaning out over the counter on her arms, another woman was leaning in over the counter on her arms, and the heads were bobbing and nodding, the eyes expressing shocked surprise and rapt appeals to the ceiling. Martha Lee could hear little scraps of conversation as she passed slowly through the shop.

"Well, as I was saying . . . . I had it from his own lips . . . . You can't believe everything you hear, but that I may be as dead as my father if . . . . . Well, God between us and all harm . . . . I got weak when she told me . . . . . There was never such villainy and badness in the town before, never, ma'am."

Martha Lee pushed open a door that creaked on a ridiculous stone, found herself in a semi-dark hallway, boxes on one side, a staircase on the other. She mounted this staircase slowly and found herself in her own bedroom. She sighed as she closed the door. She lighted a lamp and drew down the blind on the window, moved aimlessly about, while she hummed in an undertone. Her note became more and more incensed as she moved about. She stopped before the mirror and surveyed the reflection, looking at the full face, the profile, the three-quarter view, examining the back view with the aid of a hand-mirror. The inspection wound up with a final criticism of the full face again. She did not like the discontented expression. No doubt the delicate glow on the olive cheeks was heightened and improved by the walk; the eyes were fired; the lips twitched; she

began to beat the leg of the dressing table with the toe of her shoe. "Take that surly look off your face, Martha Lee," she lectured herself. She smiled radiantly; the reflection flashed back the vision. It was a very great improvement. She cut some capers before the glass, striking attitudes and indulging in little mimicries for her own enjoyment. She even tried the look of the dreamy man whose drugged intelligence was centred in the movements of a cow's tail. She clapped her hands as she got the suggestion of stupor in the eyes. "All they want is the shams," she told herself. Then a voice downstairs attracted her attention. She opened the door at once.

"Is that you, Ellen?" she called down.

"No, it's my ghost."

"Come up, please, I want you."

Ellen Noonan came up the stairs and brought into the room an air of severe plainness. There was a calmness in the homely face, a look about her of one who had been recently away from common things and who had come back to take up the threads of her routine again. She sat at the foot of the bed.

"Well, the pic-nic on the lake is off," Martha Lee said, seating herself near the window.

"The pic-nic on the lake?" Ellen Noonan repeated vaguely.

"I told you about it some time ago," Martha Lee said with some irritation.

"I believe you did, Martha."

"I did, I did. There is no 'believing' about it at all." Martha Lee began to draw off her kid gloves.

"Well, even that you did, there is no reason for

getting so cross over it, is there?" Ellen Noonan said, good humouredly.

"I'm not cross," Martha replied with a frown.

"And it is not of very much importance, is it?"

"Perhaps not—to you."

"But why is it off?"

"Luke Cusack objected. He would not come."

Martha reached out and left her gloves on the dressing table.

"Indeed?" Ellen Noonan said a little caustically.

"Yes. First when I spoke of it he agreed. He and the American cousin were to drive in on Sunday and meet us. When I heard from him again he had changed his mind."

"Well, how funny!" Ellen Noonan exclaimed. She had come back to the little problems of everyday life again. She swung her short legs energetically as she sat on the foot of the bed. "Luke Cusack!" she added with a wave of her arm. It seemed to heave the man out through the window.

"I know you do not think well of Luke," Martha Lee said, some petulancy in her tone. She undid the knot of her motor veil under her chin and began to unwind it from about her hat.

"I don't know how you can bother your head about him," Ellen Noonan made answer bluntly. "It is astonishing how you ever took up a mohawk like him."

"I never took him up," said Martha Lee, shaking out the veil with some vigour.

"Well, then he must have taken you up, which sounds ever so much worse."

"You are always disagreeable, Ellen, when you speak

of Luke," Martha Lee said a little sadly, rolling up the veil on her lap.

"And what about himself? I never saw so many angles on anybody in my life. He is like a briar or a nettle—all stings and thorns. He is always disagreeable."

"Not to me," Martha Lee said in a low voice, her head to one side as she made the veil into a compact little roll. Then the brilliant eyes shot a sudden flash at Ellen Noonan.

"Oh, you like him to be very nice to you and very cranky with everybody else?"

"Maybe," Martha Lee said demurely.

"Well, I can't understand that at all," Ellen Noonan said, with some decision. "It is pure selfishness on your part and I don't see how it can last. Your affair with Luke Cusack rests on a shaky foundation."

"Does it indeed?" Martha Lee asked, drawing a pin out from her hat. "And of course *you* know, Ellen, you are so devout. I always imagine you are shaking holy water about you to keep designing devils away, making little aspirations for fear you might stumble on the path of virtue and good works." She drew another hat pin.

"You little vixen!" Ellen Noonan exclaimed. "I often wonder how I am so fond of you."

"Now for all your piety you have your little feelings, you know, Ellen. And I had it planned that you were to have the little American all to yourself on the picnic."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes. You would get on fine, I am sure. He is

serious-minded like yourself, Ellen." She removed her hat and laid it on her lap.

Ellen Noonan laughed, then jumped in her energetic way to her feet. "Drop this nonsense," she said, "all this talk about nothing. Why can't you think of something else besides getting into little tempers about flirtations and such like trash?"

"Because I'm not good like you, Ellen."

"Then get good."

"I won't. I don't want to. I'd hate to be good, and I won't be good." She stabbed the hatpins into her hat with decision.

Ellen Noonan sat down again and regarded Martha Lee with some deliberation. Martha tossed her hat on to a box in a corner of the room, then leaned back in the chair, her arms behind her head, her eyes half closed as she regarded Ellen Noonan.

"Ellen," Martha Lee said, "I can't live without some excitement. I simply must have it, and it is as cold as charity in Ballyrea."

"Don't you think it is time for you to cast about for something to do?" Ellen Noonan asked seriously. "What are you going to do with your life?"

"Indeed I could not tell you."

"I suppose you will go into business?"

"I suppose so, but I hate to think of it." Martha Lee sat up on her chair, her expression more sobered. "Mother is beginning to talk about it, too," she added.

"What does she say?"

"She thinks she will put me to the millinery."

Ellen Noonan regarded her thoughtfully for a little,

then said: "I think your mother is right. You have very good taste; and your own appearance would stand to you."

The olive glow on the cheeks flushed. Martha Lee stood up, a look in the eyes that Ellen Noonan knew of old.

"Oh, yes; I have very good taste," she said, her tone bitter. "And because I have good taste mother will put me behind some moth-eaten old counter. There I will sit all day, Ellen, trimming hats for other girls, a pale, subdued person, no beginning and no end to my patience, growing old as the time goes, and in the end about as faded and parched and artificial as the flower that nobody buys and that lies in the bottom of the box from one season to another. Can't you see me in a corner of the dark shop, my head bowed over the eternal shape and my deft fingers manipulating the eternal trimmings?"

"Oh, nonsense, Martha. You would have sales to attend to and that sort of thing."

"Yes, I should love to rise sometimes and walk down to the mirror at the end of the shop. That would help me to battle with the dyspepsia. Don't you see me walking down to the mirror with a customer from the country, all her relatives behind her come to help her choose a hat? Don't you see me smile so agreeably and talk so pleasantly to them all? Surely I would know what would become Mary Kate and make her a fine-looking girl? My taste would stand to me. My style would impress them all until I grew too fat and a little heavy on the foot. I would be a rattling business girl for Ballyrea!"

"If these are your views your mother will have to think of something else for you, Martha."

"I was up in Conarchy's shop yesterday," Martha Lee went on, "taking it all in. There were people there having themselves fitted out. Some of them were emigrants. I waited, observing the milliner attending them, imagining myself in her place. One party in a shawl, stout and with a little wobble in the walk—she came in like this"—Martha took a little comical trot down the room—"leaned across the counter and whispered to the milliner, and the milliner whispered back. They began to nod and smile and agree with each other, and I thought in the end they would fall into each other's arms and kiss. 'But the shape—what kind of a shape would we be saying?' the milliner asked sweetly at last. The stout party gave her a thump in the neck. 'You're a devil, I hear, for the Paris fashions,' says she, 'but you'll not make a show of me, for when I do wear a headpiece I do like to feel that it has a good hoult of me. Now give me out a nice bonnet with good jaw-strings to it."

Ellen Noonan could not keep serious any longer. Martha Lee's mimicries were too good.

"When the stout party had gone with her hand-box," Martha Lee went on, "a couple of young chits from the town came fluttering in. They wore their hats on the last angle of their polls—airy pieces got up to look as if the next chance breeze that blew would waft them all up to the heavens. They were giggling, or trying to suppress giggling, as they stood at the counter. One of the party addressed the milliner in an accent that sounded as if the Reverend Mother had just

handed it out over the wall of the most select boarding school in the land for young ladies of high breeding. They had to pull down all the boxes in the place for the inspection of the young ladies. The whole stock-in-trade of the shop was reviewed, and then they bought a pennyworth of elastic, and went giggling out of the shop. They were followed by a family which was sending one of its daughters to Philadelphia from her mountain home. Her face was as hard as a board, her light brown hair lay in little lumps about her head, wisps of it streeling down her face. She looked exactly as if her clothes were bundled about her and tied in the middle with a rope—a sack of a slovenly, pugnacious-looking agricultural apparition. It was the very devil to please her. She stood viewing herself in the mirror, a hat with a blaze of colours lying lop-sided on her head. 'Do you like it?' asked one of her friends. 'I do and I don't,' she said. 'I think I'd like something livelier.' Then her mother said: 'Julia, it's crooked. Give it a twisht more to the wesht.' "

Ellen Noonan laughed until the bed shook under her at the scathing tongue, the splendid acting of the other. Then she shook her head.

"You won't do as a milliner, Martha," she said.

Martha Lee paced up and down the room, her hands behind her back, a magnificent-looking, angry pantheress.

"Oh, indeed, I will," she said, "I have such taste. And then my figure is so good, I am so stylish. 'Tall, of good appearance, very taking business address, agreeable and smart at sales'—these will be my recommendations when they want to help me out of their own

establishment into another. Why! I may become a head milliner, making miserable the lives of other milliners; I may drift into big shops in large centres and bring fame to Ballyrea by reason of my abilities. Can't you imagine it all, Ellen? Don't you see me stalking down the length of the shop, a good-looking, sharp-mannered person, quick to snub and quick to snap, the men assistants coming to the corners of their departments to eye me, and going back to their places, twirling at their ambitious moustaches. Don't you hear me calling out 'Cash!' and don't you hear the ring of the bell of the register, or the roll of the cash balls, as they run along the aerial railway to the change-angel perched up somewhere in the rafters?"

"It seems to me," said Ellen Noonan, "that you will never have anything to do with business of any kind, great or small. Shops don't seem to delight you."

"No, they don't. I hate them. I hate the smell of them. I hate the look of them. I would do almost anything to escape a life behind a counter—a life with a perch or two to hop on like a caged bird. I would like to kick all the boxes out of the shelves, to throw down the scales, to empty out the dirty tills, to blow up the smelly counters and roll out all the barrels. I'll never go into a corner of a shop and settle down there in the half light until everybody forgets me and I wither there and die."

"But what are you to do?"

Martha Lee sat down, the burst of revolt over, thoughtful and a little troubled again.

"I don't know what I can do," she said, "but I

must do something almost at once. I am only an incumbrance—a drag—on father, and I don't want that."

The two girls sat for some time in silence in the room. It was one of those little reveries which come to those of their age and their circumstances; a sort of mental bivouac before the *reveille* sounded, and they took up their burdens, setting out upon the road of chance that leads through life. There was a poignancy in the knowledge that their companionship would soon be severed. They had been good friends, thrown together a great deal, the ties that bound them strong enough to bear the strain of many differences. Ellen Noonan with her harder outlook and less complex mind had always dominated her companion whenever it came to a clash of wills. She stole a glance at Martha Lee and knew that her thoughts were troubled.

"What does it matter," Martha exclaimed characteristically after some time, shrugging her shoulders. "I suppose I will make a mess of my life."

"There is no necessity for you to do so," Ellen Noonan said dogmatically.

"We don't always need the necessity in order to blunder—at least I know I don't. But how selfish I am, after all, Ellen! Here is all the talk about me, what I am and what I amn't, what I may be and what I mayn't be. What about yourself?"

"There is not very much to be said about me," Ellen Noonan replied, a trifle uneasy now that her own turn had come.

"Why should there not be heaps to be said about you?"

"Because I have made up my mind."

"You are to be a nun? You are to enter a convent?"

"Yes, Martha, very soon."

Very soon! The quiet words struck Martha Lee like a cold blast. Ellen Noonan had seemed to her always a support and a shield, one who understood her, one to whom she could go in varying moods, one who was steadfast and collected whatever might be Martha Lee's revolts and impulses.

"I can't bear to think of losing you, Ellen," she exclaimed. "And now especially, when I must make some choice for a life."

Ellen Noonan regarded her with a smile. "You should not say that, Martha. You should be glad."

"No, I'm not glad—not the least bit pleased to hear you are to be a nun."

"There is no turning back for me now," Ellen Noonan said placidly.

"You are ever so much better able to battle with the world than I am," Martha Lee grumbled.

"As to that I have got to be tried, too, Martha. You must remember that I have my novitiate to go through. I may fail. All you can do is to pray that I may persevere."

"No," Martha Lee cried, "I will do nothing of the kind. I would be very glad if you failed."

"Martha," said Ellen Noonan, her voice full of pain, "you above all people should not say that. You ought to know very well it hurts me."

Martha Lee regarded the suddenly hardened expression on the plain face with a dull look of subdued rebellion in her eyes.

"Of course, I don't like to hurt you, Ellen," she said. "But all the same I should be deceitful if I said anything else. I tell you I hate to hear of you being a nun."

"But surely there is some merit in the choice?"

"Maybe there is. I can only tell you my own feelings. You said to me that I was selfish in regard to Luke Cusack. Is there nothing selfish in the life you are choosing for yourself?"

"Convent life is not the simple thing you fancy. I can tell you it is no joke at all."

"Don't be afraid of it, Ellen, you won't go wrong. Even if you are inclined to do a little rule-breaking now and again you will be ringed-in all right. You will find the system of the Order equal to all emergencies—you just wait and see what long penances they have invented for short tempers."

"You are contradicting yourself already, Martha. You nearly always do when you talk for any length of time."

"I say that you are more selfish than I am," Martha Lee insisted.

"We are all human—nuns and milliners, rich and poor, great and small—and all are open to temptation."

"That sounds nice and smug. But you won't be tempted much, Ellen. I don't think the devil does much business in a convent. The worst he will do is to throw you down stairs, as he did—was it Saint Teresa? I shall have to battle with the world and the flesh, and if the devil gets a hold of me he will throw me down somewhere else."

Ellen Noonan laughed, her equanimity restored.

There was always some undercurrent of humour in Martha Lee's outbursts that robbed them of their bitterness. They were just as wayward and unstable as herself, the embryo nun told herself.

Before the argument could go farther the door was pushed open a little, and the head of one Aggie, red and smiling, her hair tousled, appeared to view.

"Miss Martha," said Aggie, "I come up to tell you that Paddy Hannon is just after bringing a letter to the house for you." Aggie's arm, bare to the elbow, and black as the hob up to the same point, shot in the door, a letter held by the fraction of an inch between the thumb and finger. Martha Lee ran for the letter, and Aggie withdrew as suddenly as she had come.

Martha opened the letter and read it eagerly beside the lamp. Her colour was changing, lightening and darkening as quickly as her eyes ran over the lines. Ellen Noonan observed the changing face with some concern. Martha folded up the letter slowly when she had finished, crossed over to a little writing-desk and locked it up. Ellen Noonan said nothing. But heretofore letters, no matter how intimate or personal, were always passed from one to the other and openly discussed. For the first time, as far as she knew, there was to be a secret between them. Ellen Noonan had an uncomfortable feeling that a gap was beginning to yawn between herself and Martha Lee.

"That letter was from Luke Cusack," Martha said, a little nervously, as she went back to her seat.

"Oh, is that all?" Ellen Noonan said, the note ironic. "He has not changed his mind again about the pic-nic, has he?"

"No," Martha replied, her manner absent-minded. Her toe began to beat the leg of the chair. Ellen Noonan observed the symptom.

"So I won't see the American," Ellen Noonan exclaimed.

"I suppose not." Then after a pause Martha added, "I imagine Luke does not care very much for his cousin."

"I wonder does his cousin care very much for Luke Cusack?" Ellen Noonan mused, mischief in her voice.

Martha Lee made no retort; her wits were dulled; she became more abstract in her gaze; Ellen Noonan thought that she began to look even a little miserable.

"I wonder will I be a milliner after all?" Martha mused half-absently after some time.

"I don't know, indeed, Martha. The selfish religious life and the rules of the Order have recorded nothing on the point."

"Neither has Luke Cusack, if that's what you mean," Martha Lee retorted, roused for a moment. Ellen Noonan laughed and rose to go.

"You are not going, are you, Ellen?"

"Yes, I must clear."

"Were you praying this evening?" Martha asked, her eyes catching the edge of a little book that peeped from the pocket of Ellen Noonan's jacket.

"Yes, I was in the Chapel, paying a visit before I came here.

Martha Lee's hands were on her lap, smoothing each other down nervously.

Ellen Noonan thought that Martha not alone now looked miserable, but almost shrunken, her nervous-

ness more marked. Ellen Noonan turned to go, her hand on the knob of the door.

"Ellen!" There was pain, distress in the voice.

"What is the matter, Martha?"

"I am most miserable, Ellen. Don't leave me."

Ellen Noonan looked across the room at Martha Lee.

"But what is the matter?" she repeated.

"Don't blame me, Ellen, I can't help it, but—but—oh, Ellen, I am a coward. I am getting afraid."

Ellen Noonan's womanly intuition was on edge, all the knowledge that sprung from her companionship with Martha Lee at once alert. Something in the girl's life that she knew nothing of was, she felt, struggling for expression.

"Afraid of whom?" she asked, her tone sympathetic encouraging.

"Afraid of Luke Cusack."

Martha Lee's head drooped. Ellen Noonan noted the sheen in the hair. She walked across the room and stood over Martha Lee.

"Why should you be afraid of him?" she asked.

Martha Lee looked up slowly. There were tears in her eyes.

"Because he wants me to do something desperate, Ellen," she said. "Don't leave me, Ellen."

Martha Lee was a little hysterical.

Ellen Noonan knelt down beside her chair, put her arm about her, and Martha Lee's head fell on her shoulder like the head of a half-frightened child.

CHAPTER XI.

A BID FOR THE LAND.

"Why, if we had such a proposition in the States we would boom it some. And here you drone along as if nothing was happening. One would fancy the old sod was just left to those it belonged," Brendan Nilan exclaimed. He was discussing with Mark Cusack the question of the purchase by the people of the land—the revolution that would transform them from serfs, creatures of a feudal horror, into peasant proprietors. He had had his imagination fired with much recent readings and discussions on the agrarian war. And the people in Clonlea were taking the matter with a coolness which amazed him. Mark Cusack now listened to his outbursts with his eyes half-closed, a half smile on his lips. Brendan Nilan gathered that Mark Cusack was to have a very great influence in this tremendous business. Men had been coming from considerable distances to talk it over with him for some days past. Mark Cusack was an excellent listener in these matters, and a great conserver of his own views. There was no more scrupulous observer of the advice of old Polonius to "give every man thine ear but few thy tongue." Brendan Nilan on the contrary was voluble on the subject. His voice would become more staccato as his excitement mounted. He could not understand the stolidity of the people of Clonlea, and was out to rouse them.

One evening representatives of the tenants from every part of the estate suddenly descended upon the Clonlea schoolhouse. They had come to decide on what policy they should adopt at the conference with the landlord's agent. It was the second bid they were making for their redemption, negotiations having broken down some months ago.

They were not a quarter of an hour closeted in the schoolhouse when the crowd of people who waited outside were aware that feeling ran high. Loud voices were raised inside. Angry fists were brought down on the school benches. The voices broke into shouts, threats, screaming appeals. Some of the agitation communicated itself to those outside.

Brendan Nilan noticed that at first the women drew away from the men and stood huddled in groups by themselves, the movements of their arms, the manipulation of the shawls on their heads, alone betraying their uneasiness. They spoke in whispers, viewing the men in furtive glances. The men, too, spoke in whispers. Fears and doubts were expressed. They seemed to look into each other's eyes with a half-hunted, suspicious, half-despairful look—such a look as was in itself a thing of the land war. Brendan Nilan was conscious himself of a sense of isolation. The people shut him out of their affairs. They did not do so deliberately, but nevertheless their manner, their very attitude towards his presence, gave him a feeling that he was somebody apart, a stranger, almost an intruder. There was present that conservatism, that gulf, which he felt sometimes he would never be able to bridge. At moments of crisis like this it always asserted itself.

There was some traffic of people in and out from the schoolhouse, and the main current of the disputation got bruited about outside. One man, it was said, was standing out against the rest of the tenants. He wanted them to hold out and play for a better bargain. They were storming at him to no purpose.

"I am a struggling man and I want relief"—"I owe rent. If the purchase fails now I am broken for ever"—"I stood by Davitt's side when he founded the Land League. I went to jail under every Coercion Act. I fought under Parnell till he fell. Now I say to the tenants, make peace by purchase"—"I was evicted and saw my family crawl into a ditch in the night—my children crying as they lay down in the mud about my wife. Christ! she was a spirited woman, and I saw her lying with her children there, no better than a sow with a litter of bonhams huddled about her. Am I to sink now before I see my holding restored?"

These had, it was whispered, been some of the things said in the schoolhouse. Old men who had gone out at the Fenian Rising, moderate men, dispirited men, men who quaked in their boots at the name of the landlord's agent, men who were fretting to get away from all turmoil and all agitation, all men with the land hunger, all men in quest of a redeemed farm, a sprinkling of young men who had an old dream new-kindled in their eyes and who were eager to see the last of agrarianism that they might enter a purer and higher nationalism—all these had stood up with varying appeals to the one man who held on to the hard terms of a tight bargain.

"Is he giving way to them?"

"Who?"

"Mark Cusack?"

"They say not. It is terrible. He and Father Hugh Whelan broke the purchase before. The land will never be bought."

Such were the words spoken about the schoolhouse. Lamps were lighted outside. The discussion went on, the voices quieting down through sheer exhaustion. Many of the people went home in silence, carrying a gloom with them as they went down the roads or struck up paths across the hills.

It was observed that when the storm broke about him Mark Cusack had said very little, merely holding on to his points. Now as the discussion died down to a low monotonous hum—not unlike the murmur of the children's voices when tired over their tasks—the voice of Mark Cusack grew sharper, more incisive, seemed to predominate.

Brendan Nilan waited up with Mrs. Cusack for the others. It was midnight when Mark came in, carrying his usual air of good humour with him.

"What! Up until this hour of the night!" he exclaimed. "Mother, you ought to have more sense."

"We waited up to hear about the purchase," Mrs. Cusack said, anxiously. "What did they do?"

"What *could* they do?" Mark said. "They could not buy from each other." Then turning to Brendan Nilan he said, "To-morrow we meet the agent, so peg off to bed, young man, for we must be on the road early."

"Was Father Hugh Whelan of Ballyhague there?" Mrs. Cusack asked.

A grim look gathered about the corners of Mark

Cusack's mouth and he half-closed his eyes for a moment in his characteristic way. "No," he said, "he was not. He left me a lovely job—I was like a badger in a barrel with all the beagles of the countryside pulling at me. I'll keep it in the nose for Father Hugh. But no matter—everybody run right off to bed." And he turned with a smile as he mimicked the American, struck a match, put it to a candle, and strode into his bedroom.

"What about Luke?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"He's with the stragglers, I go bail," Mrs. Cusack said. "They'll settle it all over again now at the crossroads. They will have great wisdom when 'tis all over. I will leave the door on the latch for him."

Brendan Nilan was the last to leave the kitchen. He had taken up his lighted candle when a voice in a husky stage whisper accosted him from somewhere overhead. He was so startled that he almost dropped the candle.

"Did they make the purchase, Mr. Nilan?" the voice asked.

Brendan Nilan raised the candle as he gazed aloft. Out of the background of the black ceiling and the black rafters a head and shoulders stood out. The beaming face and bare shining shoulders and breast of Dominick were visible. He looked like a caricature of a head-and-shoulder cherub in a sacred picture by Michael Angelo.

"Taking my rest, sir. It is up here I do be sleeping—this is the kitchen loft—and a very fine warm place it is to sleep, too."

"Dominick, you tickle me to death."

The cherub at once vanished, and Brendan Nilan

fancied he heard a body being rolled about on a bed amid much suppressed amusement.

He walked into the bedroom. Mark Cusack was kneeling by the side of his bed, his face in his hands, praying.

Next morning Brendan Nilan drove to Ballyrea with Mark Cusack and Matty Donovan the County Councillor. Matty Donovan he recognised as the man with the long narrow face who was among the group of people who welcomed him to Clonlea. He had heard of him a few times since. The County Councillor never smiled, changed his expression, or betrayed any sign of human emotion. The skin was drawn tight over his face, especially across the compressed lips. Yet every time Brendan Nilan looked at him he felt that behind the mask there was an eternal humour. He reminded Brendan Nilan of one of those amazing Russian stories he had read in which the mask of a Chinese face, on which every vestige of human expression was frozen, put all beholders into uncontrollable laughter by turning up at awkward moments.

Brendan Nilan, catching sight of the County Councillor's grim mask now and again, had all he could do to prevent a burst of merriment at its inscrutable and silent eloquence. It was like a sardonic and eternal comment on the comedy of the universe.

They were a little behind time at Ballyrea. When they reached the room of the hotel in which the conference took place the proceedings had just begun.

The prospective peasant proprietors were standing about, more or less ranged along by the walls. Their heavy boots made a shuffling noise on the floor. Some

women wearing dark-hooded cloaks were sprinkled among them. Mark Cusack and the County Councillor at once took their place among them. Brendan Nilan hesitated. Some subtle touch in the manner of Mark gave him to understand that he must stand aloof from the tenants; once more he felt himself up against the barrier of reserve beyond which he dare not step. He was embarrassed for a moment and then took a vacant chair beside some reporters at the table.

He glanced about him with lively curiosity at the human elements of a bloody revolution. The tenants he was now familiar with. The solicitor for the landlord was standing at the head of the table making a statement. He was laying down the terms of the sale. His voice was subdued, his tone conciliatory, persuasive, his manner and accent after the most approved imitation House of Lords pattern. Beside him sat the land agent. This was the man who was a real and visible power in the revolution. There was nobody to question his administration of the estate, for nearly all the landlords were absentees and had—brave hearts!—fought their battles by a paid deputy such as this one. Here was the adventurer who had grown accustomed to exercise the right of life and death over other men. Here was one who knew he could be the destroyer of homes, the blighter of whole countrysides. Beside him stood the armed forces of an Empire. They were at his behest. Ministers, alleged rulers of the Empire, he had come to regard as mere tools to be beckoned when required in his lust for class conquest. They were necessary to him in the business of banishing the creature made unto the image and likeness of God in order that cattle might

browse on the site of men's homes. Here he sat now facing the remnant of the rabble he had fought and which in the end had won. They had not come, as the French populace had come, maddened with the lust for blood, to chop off his head and make a jest of his death. He sat waiting for them, beaten on the main issue, to see if still his craft might not be a match for them at the business of bargaining.

Brendan Nilan, his mind filled with these thoughts, looked curiously at the land agent. He was a man well on in life, but sat so stiff and straight-backed in his chair that it gave him a military bearing. His face was framed in a very white beard, which emphasised a ruddy complexion. The face was long, the forehead narrow and greatly wrinkled. Large, lifeless grey eyes and immensely arched eyebrows added to the general expression of owl-like impassivity. He gave one the impression of a man of very little emotion, one whose passions would be restricted, whose pleasure in life would find an outlet in a strict attention to the details of systematic cruelty. He might be taken for one of those grim officials who are now and then dug out of Government offices to reluctantly claim the pension which makes smooth the way to the shroud.

From the figure of the agent the eyes of Brendan Nilan wandered to a black-clothed person sitting aloof by the window.

"Ah," he said, "here is Father Hugh Whelan, of Ballyhague, the hero of my aunt!"

Father Hugh Whelan had his back partly turned to the company, leaning on a stout umbrella between his knees. His tall hat was left on the ground beside his

chair, a red handkerchief visible within it, for Father Hugh Whelan belonged to the old school. He, too, was a man well advanced in life, the frame thick set, but with some infirmity overtaking him, his face disagreeable in expression, a grey look of hunger upon it—"a raw, mountainy man," Brendan Nilan thought, lapsing into the local manner of speech which he was picking up pretty fast. Father Hugh appeared to take a very lively interest in the people passing up and down the street outside the window and none at all in the speech of the man of law.

As Brendan Nilan gazed upon him he heard the door open and a "pad-pad" across the floor. It was the woman with the feet from Clonlea. She took her place among the tenants, her good-natured face beaming on those about her. Brendan Nilan had heard some confused story as to how she had saved the lives of two men by her presence of mind in concealing a smoking gun that had brought down a tyrant at the cross of Clonlea.

Mark Cusack had slipped in among the people directly facing the agent, and Brendan Nilan had no doubt that he did so deliberately. The agent had slowly raised his lifeless eyes for a moment, then dropped them again, twirling a gold signet ring around one of his fingers. Matty Donovan, the County Councillor, leaned forward on his stick, following the words of the solicitor with great gravity, the eternal humour bottled up behind his mask. He threw his gaze modestly on the floor as the solicitor begged the tenants to courageously banish from their minds the method of calculation based on the number of years' purchase of the land. He urged them rather, like sensible men and sensible women—here the

solicitor, an effeminate person, made a curiously awkward courtesy in honour of the women—to contemplate the reduction the purchase annuity would mean compared with the existing rents. Then there was a little refined peroration delivered in a half husky voice, in which the figure of an Angel of Peace with beautiful wings spread over a troubled land was once more pressed into service. Everybody smiled except Matty Donovan. Father Hugh Whelan made some move in his chair which seemed to express the opinion that this white Angel of Peace might be regarded, out of his long experience, as a thorough impostor.

The statement over, the tenants broke into little groups, whispering and gesticulating. They were allowed their own time for a consultation before replying to the terms of sale. Gradually they filed out of the room. They stood about the open hall-way outside, talking in twos and threes in a helpless, abandoned way.

A pert maid in cap and flying streamers made her way through them with a contemptuous sniffle; she was the daughter of a small farmer. The barmaid stared out at them with stony eyes over the counter, rows of gaily-labelled bottles making a lively background for her elaborate black hair; she, too, had come in from the land.

A bustling commercial traveller, lack lustre of eye, ambassadorial of manner, rushed in, pulled up in surprise and said: "Hello! What's up?"

The boots reached for his bag, and said with good-humoured toleration, "Oh, these people came in about the land; they'll be clearing out pretty soon."

The boots had cut turf in the bogs before the glamour of the hotel had fallen upon him.

The solicitor picked his teeth, and the agent smoked a cigar while they waited the decision of the tenants. The priest continued to sit by the window. Brendan Nilan struck up a conversation with one of the reporters, but soon tired of it. The reporter appeared to care for no subject under heaven except that which coursed along the scale of salaries of the world's recording angels.

Mark Cusack came over to him after a little, and then they went down to Father Hugh Whelan.

"Will they buy, do you think, Father Hugh?" Mark asked as they shook hands.

Brendan Nilan was conscious that the agent and the solicitor at once cocked their ears for the priest's reply. There was an eloquent silence for a moment.

"Who knows that?" replied the priest in a voice which carried well all over the room. "It would be hard to tell what a pack of rascals like them will do. It was only Sunday I had to speak off the Altar about robbery. I am forty years in Ballyhague parish giving them the word of God. I would want forty years more to make what I call a Christian place of it."

"Why are they not brought together for an orderly discussion of their affairs?" Brendan Nilan broke in. Father Hugh ignored him.

"Maybe it is too much of a reduction they are getting," went on Father Whelan. "If the lads get much more of their own way the devil himself will not be able to hold them."

"They should be told to base their calculation on the number of years' purchase," Brendan Nilan insisted.

"It is the only basis of calculation. Everybody knows that who is not a fool. Whatever they are the people are being had." His tone had become nasal, his ears flamed.

Father Whelan turned slowly and regarded him steadily with his sharp eyes.

"To whom does this gossoon belong?" he asked at last in the most withering tone.

"He is a cousin of mine from America," Mark Cusack replied quietly.

"I'm not surprised," said Father Whelan. "Look," he went on steadily, "at the golden tooth of him and at the fine white collar he has standing about his neck. Your face is as fair, sonny, as the face of an innocent little lamb. Come out till we get something in celebration of it."

He rose with difficulty and walked out of the room, limping and halting. Brendan Nilan hesitated, his pride wounded, his self-assurance checked. Mark Cusack, however, winked at him to follow, and he went.

"Was it not a poor case to be routing me out of my house this morning and I badly able to walk down to the gate?" Father Whelan complained as they crossed the room. "The east wind whipping me across the bog on the sidecar. But nothing would do but the procession of blackguards, but that I should lead them in to buy the land."

"You would need a glass of something," said Mark Cusack, "for it is a raw day and you not too hearty, Father Hugh."

They passed through the tenants on their way out. They were still hanging about, some sitting listlessly on

a long bench, one man with his head dejectedly in his hands.

The boots was removing a grumbling old man who had settled himself down for a smoke on the steps of the stairs. On a tall narrow hall-chair the woman with the feet was seated serenely alone, her hands folded in her lap, her pleasant face one ray of good humour. She looked as happy as if she were having the time of her life. They made way for the priest as he passed through them, his exertion in walking causing his face to twitch from some inward pain. Father Hugh Whelan insisted on paying for a drink, taking the money from a long faded calico bag tied about with many strings.

"I will not look at the whiskey myself," he said. "Ale is more wholesome for the troubled kidneys. And still I don't think it of any great service. Wait, hand me that jug of water. Is it from a spring well? Very good. There ought to be nice lime in it and this place resting on a bed of limestone. That's a good girl, don't be afraid, fill it up. You're the dead spit of your father, Ned McGarry of Blakestown. I hardly knew you with the dint of fuzzy black hair you have caused to burst about your giddy head, Mary M'Garry."

He passed the whiskey to Mark Cusack, and, turning to Brendan Nilan, filled a tumbler with water for him. "Toss that off, sonny, and never be talking of cocktail till you know your Catechism. Here's to the estate!"

The barmaid retired, eyeing the priest from behind a barrel with hoops painted to look like gold while she pretended to wash glasses. Two of the tenants gaped in at the glass door, and then shouldered awkwardly into the place. The priest turned his back and they brushed

past him, getting a drink farther down the counter. But gradually they edged up to the other group. Brendan Nilan turned to them; they were apparently from some remote part of the estate. He spoke to the nearest one.

"Say, what about the land?" he asked directly.

"The land, is it?" the peasant smiled—or rather echoed—vaguely.

"Are you to buy it right off?"

"They came in about buying it surely."

"Get the number of years' purchase. And bring the people together. How are you ever to decide if you mope about this way?"

"I don't know indeed. Maybe they don't want to come together at all?"

"Do you want to get them together?"

"Me? Oh, I'm only one."

"Are you not buying your land?"

"They're thinking of buying the estate."

"How much land have you, anyway?"

"I have ten acres about my house, nine over at Larraghmore, a strip in common with my brother, the miller, and the grazing of a couple of head of cattle from William MacDonagh. After that again I have my share of what grass is growing in the turlough when the water leaves it in the heat of the summer. Make what you can out of that."

"And your rental? I want to get at the number of years' purchase you will be called on to pay."

"I know nothing about that."

"Did you fight some in the land war?"

There was a sudden burst of hearty laughter in the hall outside. The tenant turned his head in that direc-

tion, smiling sympathetically, "They're having a joke without," he said.

Brendan Nilan turned to Mark. Mark had his head close to the head of Father Whelan, and they were speaking rapidly in an undertone.

Brendan Nilan went out into the hall. The tenants were now all gathered together in a corner speaking earnestly and with interested animation. Matty Donovan, the County Councillor, was moving up and down on the outskirts of the group, like a dog who had rounded up a flock of sheep.

"Good," Brendan Nilan said, "they're getting together for business at last." He went up to the group and stood in it for a little while. Then he came rushing back to the bar, meeting the priest and Mark Cusack as they came out.

"Great Scott!" Brendan Nilan exclaimed, "do you know what they are all talking about?"

"What?"

"The price of American bacon!"

Father Whelan smiled, showing a row of beautiful teeth. A dejected-looking man came up to him.

"What in the name of God are we going to do about the land, Father Hugh?" he asked, his caubeen under his arm, cringing in his manner.

"Go out of my sight, Phil Dooley," the priest replied, "you and your mangy land."

"'Twas fought hard for," said Dooley, who had a habit of coiling his hands about each other as if they were in an everlasting basin of water. His eyes were shifty, one protruding, giving him a sinister appearance.

"Where were you when the land was fought for?"

Father Whelan almost shouted at him. "You were burning your treacherous shanks before the fire, you ashy pet, until a man could read the alphabet on the blade of your shin bone. When you weren't doing that, you were nosing about the country seeking whatever bit of ground there was to be grabbed. I had to go between you and the Widow Moynihan's little place, and it was only the fear of the vengeance of God that kept you from defying me! And to-day you are going to buy out your farm, Phil Dooley!" Dooley shrank before the attack of the priest, his protruding eye swimming in water, his hands making the perpetual lather. Brendan Nilan heard Mark Cusack mutter behind him, "A bloody scut!"

Father Whelan shuffled for the hotel door. He looked disapprovingly at the main group of the tenants, "A pack of daylight robbers!" he exclaimed.

Brendan Nilan turned to a woman who stood apart. She wore the hood of her cloak over her head unlike Western women, for she was a Southern who had migrated to Connacht and brought her Southern customs with her. The dark hood hung loose from her head, framing a strong, taciturn face.

"Why does Father Whelan abuse you?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"He does not abuse us. I heard no word against us," the woman replied with some indignation.

"Why, he has called you villains, blackguards, daylight robbers!"

"He has not, *aroo*," the woman said, breaking into her Munster dialect. "It is how that was not meant for us at all."

"Then for whom was it meant?"

"Wisha!" the woman began, and then pulled up, looking about her cautiously. Her hand came out from the folds of her cloak. She was wearing black worsted mittens. Her square masculine thumb bent back, pointing significantly in the direction of the room where the agent waited.

"*Tigin tu anois?*" ("Do you understand now?") she asked in Gaelic as she walked away.

Father Hugh Whelan had his hand on the swinging glass door leading into the street when he turned back, fixing his eyes on Matty Donovan, the County Councillor. "He wants twenty-six and a half years' purchase of the second term judicial rents," he said very distinctly. "It's too much." Then his hand went up—a white plump masterful-looking hand that commanded the eyes of every tenant in the place. The outspread fingers suddenly closed; the hand was a tightly-closed fist. One could almost hear the snap of the closing fingers. Then the door swung to, and he was gone.

The tenants at once trooped back to the room, shouldering and pushing. The solicitor rose with an expectant smile. He made another little speech, mostly given up to a summary of the terms he had already laid down, so that there would be no mistake. In the course of that speech he more and more addressed himself to Mark Cusack, drawn to him by some subtle force.

"And now I take it, gentlemen, you have come to a conclusion as to the acceptance or otherwise of these terms," he concluded.

The people all began to look in the direction of Mark Cusack. Brendan Nilan felt the excitement of the

moment. He felt thrilled that his cousin should be the one man appealed to at this crisis.

He turned to Mark, his voice, as usual in moments of excitement, sharp and staccato, as he whispered: "It's right up against you now, Mark; don't slip your trolley."

Mark, to whom this advice was so much Greek, stepped deliberately forward and spoke platitudinously as a member of Parliament.

"I am deputed by my fellow-tenants on the estate," he said, "to relate briefly that they have given your proposals their best consideration. After anxious reflection, and taking all the circumstances into account, they regret that they cannot accept the terms. They do not wish to own the land at such a price—twenty-six and a half years' purchase of the second term rents—not to speak of the bonus."

"May I ask if this decision is unanimous?"

It was the agent who spoke for the first time. His words rang over the room with a metallic clang; it was the voice of a ring-master in a circus tent. He raised his lifeless eyes, and they searched the tenants one after another. But the fascination of the eye of the agent was gone; the old spell begotten in terrorism was broken. The whip and the sop of the reign of terror no longer found a back bared for the one and a hand reaching out for the other. He met a row of faces as expressionless as a brick wall. There was no hoped-for breach in the combination. Mark Cusack was the last man the agent looked upon. His expression betrayed a peculiar emotion, an emotion which was intense, but platonically cruel. If ever events should so shape themselves that the agent could put his claws upon this defiant young

peasant, the agent would slowly, surely, and, above all, legally, do him out of every scrap of heritage in the country, ruin him beyond any hope of redemption. He would ride out solemnly to see the battering-rams raze his house to the ground, if necessary, stand by the gallows while they hanged the peasant by the head, all the time betraying no emotion. When the ceremony had concluded he would sing a psalm—generously give credit to the Lord God for the whole proceedings. For, of course, as everything was carried out strictly according to British law it could not be but pleasing in the sight of God—seeing that the British Crown and the Most High were one and practically the same thing to the mind of the agent. He expected to one day see the Heavenly Host assembled around the Throne of the Lord in Heaven, and that Heavenly Host would, of course, be drawn exclusively from landed proprietors and their followers and governed entirely according to conservative principles.

Mark Cusack understood very well all that was conveyed by the look that the agent gave him—he was so close to him that he could see the hairs on the tip of a nose that was rough and coloured; if he put out his hand he could take the agent by the white beard. But he merely returned the gaze, his dark face scowling in a black suppressed passion. Mark Cusack would fight this agent to the very Judgment Day. He would fight him with whatever weapons lay to his hands. He had practically begun his conscious boy-life in a land war riot. He was thrown to the ground, and small as he was his arms wound themselves around the thigh of a policeman while he sank his sharp teeth into the calf of the police-

man's leg. He knew very well that if the agent got him down he was finished, but he would fight him, openly as far as he could, but if nothing else could be done, he would lie for nights on his belly behind a ditch in the hope of putting a bullet in the agent's body. If he saw the man writhing in his death agony on the dust of the road he would not be in the least moved to pity. He would rise up out of the ditch and cry: "There is another damned soul blown to blazes—I have committed no crime, it is no murder, thank God."

When these men stood looking at each other now, conveying all these things, they crushed into the look the bitterness of the whole agrarian struggle. It was not alone that the spoil between them was land, the price of land, a bargain carrying with it the loss to one side of an enormous class power, but behind it all was a burning racial hatred, an antagonism that had its roots in differences of race and blood and religion.

The agent was the first to speak.

"The future," he said, "will proclaim the folly of your decision to-day." He drawled the words out, solemn as if he were delivering a prophecy.

When Mark Cusack replied, his words were innately peasant in their innuendo of mystery, threat, and humour. "Maybe it will," he said, "but you can never tell how or what way things happen in this country. The oligarchy has gone bad in the legs anyway, and will never stand up erect again."

"Is this the view of the other tenants also?" the agent asked at once, quick to seize anything which might suggest future strife, suffering to many of them, a return to coercion. He played for some wavering, a

breach in the combination, a return to panic. He would in that event have a master advantage in the bargaining —if he was compelled to sell.

"Mark Cusack speaks for me," said the quiet voice of Matty Donovan, the County Councillor.

"And for me—and for me—and for me." The words rattled round the room from the mouth of one tenant to another like the rattle of pistol shots. The solicitor, bland and futile, rose to intervene. He begged to bring their minds briefly over the history of the negotiations. As he fished about for words the tenants with one accord turned and flocked out of the room and the hotel.

The solicitor fiddled with his spectacles for a little, then sank back in the chair. "Well," he said, "damn Father Whelan and that young cub, Cusack."

The agent seemed to hitch his eyebrows a degree higher, gathered up some papers from the table, and without a word left the place with military strides.

When they were driving home from Ballyrea, Brendan Nilan said to Mark Cusack, "I wish you would always take me to places like this conference to-day, Mark."

"Why?"

"Because it helps me to understand Ireland."

Mrs. Cusack was waiting at the little gate in front of the house when they arrived in Clonlea. She came to the car eagerly, her face anxious and pallid. She scanned the three men as they dismounted, something seeming to die in her face, leaving her expression one of great misery. Brendan Nilan expected that she was becoming hysterical over the land purchase business.

"Where is Luke?" she asked, her hands nervous in their movements.

"Luke?" Mark queried. "He is here, I suppose."

"He is not," said Mrs. Cusack. "I was hoping he would be with you."

"He did not come with us," Mark said.

"I have not seen him. Nobody has any account of him since he left the house to go to the school-house yesterday evening."

"But," Mark broke in, his face now very serious, "he was not in the school-house yesterday evening."

"Not in the school-house?" Mrs. Cusack said, her tone hopeless.

"No."

"At first I thought he had gone to Ballyrea with you when I found his bedroom empty this morning. And the bed was not slept in either."

There was a painful silence, then some tears began to drop rapidly from Mrs. Cusack's eyes. She wrung her hands in distress. "Good God," she cried at length, "what has happened to Luke at all?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARRIAGE.

I.

THE angular figure of Luke Cusack bent shadowily over the dressing table in the dim light—dim despite the window and the smoky lamp beside the looking-glass. His fingers were making, with difficulty, a knot in a new tie of a bold red and green pattern. The door opened.

"Are you ready, Luke?" his cousin, Peter Mulvehill, a lad of eighteen, asked.

Luke creaked about on his angular bones. "Peter," he said, "do you think is the tie becoming to me?" His manner was sombre.

"It is becoming to you, Luke. It's grand."

Luke drew on his coat and, having again surveyed himself in the dim glass, he followed his cousin down a semi-dark stairway, out a hall-door, and into the street.

The light of day was still uncertain. The streets were deserted, the shops all shuttered, the blinds drawn on the windows. Little flocks of jackdaws made descents from the chimneys on to the road, squabbling for such scraps of food as were to be found there. A cat sprang across the road, pushed under a gate, and immediately from a back-yard the howls of other cats greeted the day.

Luke Cusack dragged his legs along in his peculiar gait, his hand now and again feeling the tie at his neck. He broke the silence, stopping suddenly, to say:

"Are you sure the tie is becoming to me?"

"It is becoming to you. It's a nice tie."

"Is it becoming to me in the daylight?"

"Amn't I telling you it is? I wouldn't go tell you a lie—a morning like this."

"I think it is becoming to me. I was afraid it wouldn't."

They resumed their way, Luke Cusack running his hand on the back of his coat, looking down at his pants, settling the cap on his head, but his fingers always going back to the tie. Everything he wore was new.

They paced leisurely through the main street at Ballyrea, turned down a side street to the right, this bringing them into another wide half-vacant street, across the road from them rising the grey-blue proportions of a cathedral, behind the cathedral the bright grey water of the lake, and beyond the lake the vague outline of sloping ground. They crossed the road to the cathedral, entered the grounds, mounted the steps to the Gothic doorway, dipped their fingers in the holy water font in the porch, blessed themselves, and entered the edifice. Their steps sounded somewhat alarmingly in the silent building as they moved up the centre aisle to a front bench before the altar.

"The curate said for you to be near the altar rails," young Mulvehill whispered to Luke Cusack.

"He did, the curate said that," Luke agreed solemnly. They moved into a bench and sat down.

"I think we came a bit early," Luke Cusack whispered, after some long minutes. His fingers strayed back to his neck-tie.

"The clock must be a little fast," agreed the other.

There was another long silence. Young Mulvehill yawned. Luke Cusack whispered.

" I'm not sure about the tie. I'm not sure if it is becoming to me."

" Well, I tell you it is, Luke, very becoming. I never saw a nicer tie."

" The green stripe I'm thinking of," Luke muttered. " It's a bit dark in the shade."

Young Mulvehill blessed himself and knelt down on the rail before him.

II.

" Did you sleep at all last night, Martha?" Ellen Noonan asked.

" Well, I hardly slept a wink."

" Like a top," Martha Lee replied promptly.

Martha Lee laughed in a soft voice. " What a goose you are when it comes to business, Ellen!" she exclaimed.

Ellen Noonan's face changed. The expression became dogmatic. She said shortly:

" Marriage is not a business. It is a sacrament."

" How you refresh a person's mind," Martha Lee said. " I do believe Ellen, I'd forget even my Catechism only you let me have so many quotations from it. You're a regular revivalist."

" Martha, I wish you would not be so frivolous. You make me quite nervous when you get into that mood."

They turned about a corner, emerging into the main street. The blinds were all down on the windows. The

shutters were on the shop fronts. The jackdaws squabbled in the street. The cats were holding an *aeridheacht* in the back yard.

"I was dreadfully afraid somebody—your father, perhaps—would discover all about the marriage just at the eleventh hour," Ellen Noonan said. "It is so like you to have a secret marriage."

"It is more romantic," Martha Lee said almost gaily. "I would run away to get married if I could, but to do it properly I would require a carriage, a pair of dashing horses, and somebody—an explosive old uncle for preference—post-haste in pursuit. All that takes money. Poor Luke and myself are walking to the ceremony, and after the sumptuous breakfast we're taking two third-class tickets to Galway, where the honeymoon will be spent."

"Martha, look! Is that a woman peeping out from behind a blind on the window?"

"I don't know. It looks like one. Maybe she is suffering from neuralgia. Well, as I was saying, the railway clerk snaps the two tickets in the date box, and, lo! and behold! the romance is ended."

"How can you talk like that, Martha? And on a morning like this, too."

"Ah, look up at that name, Ellen," Martha Lee said, stopping in the street.

Ellen Noonan looked up at the sign over the shop door: "B. Conarchy—Drapery—Millinery."

"That," said Martha, "is where I was to take up my great mission in life next month. Mother had it all arranged. My prospects were splendid. I was sure to get on well. I had such taste! I was so stylish!

There I was to pour out all the genius of my heart and soul, in wonderful deeds among flowers and fruits and birds and beasts, in ribbons, chiffons, gauzes, laces and veils! The cunning of my fingers, the lightning of my eyes, the imagination of my brain, were to be concentrated in one life-long, passionate decoration of the female numbskulls of Ballyrea!"

"Martha, I will ask you to remember——"

"Very well. It was not to be, as they say in the novels. Instead of that great welter of millinery, I'm a bonny bride, escorted at an early hour to the church door by an enthusiastic crowd of jeering jackdaws."

"For heaven's sake, Martha!"

"Well, as they say in the mountains, the back of my hand to millinery, and likewise to sales!"

They turned down a street to the right. It led them to the wide space before the cathedral. They crossed the road in silence.

In the porch they paused, blessing themselves. Through the door they got a vista of the interior of the dim church, vacant benches, pillars which threw dark shadows, a red light burning in the great swinging lamp before the high altar, the sacred figures coming into a vague relief in the stained glass window, the glimmer of chaste white marble altar rails. A little wave of devotional emotion swept Ellen Noonan, and she stood, bowing her head for a moment in silent prayer.

"After the ceremony, Martha . . . won't we wait for the early Mass?" Ellen Noonan whispered.

"Yes, Ellen."

Then the two girls walked quietly up the aisle of the Church.

III.

There was some stir in life in Ballyrea as the little marriage party emerged from the Cathedral, the man and the wife leading the way. Shop doors were being opened, shutters were being taken from the windows, blinds were raised, people moved about their counters, the eternal hope of a little day's business in their hearts; an occasional cart rumbled on the road, labourers passed along to their work, cows were being driven back to the pastures after the milking, an odd pious soul trotted along for the second Mass. The marriage party, conscious that it stood in the waking eye of Ballyrea, hurried along the flagways. Now and then people came to a doorway to look after them and speculate. A pair of cronies in shawls waited at the corner of the main street to let them pass. The voices behind the shawls said:

"I'm right! It is a wedding. Look at all the white she has on her hat."

"She's the bride as sure as a gun. Ah, now I have her! It's me brave Martha Lee! Now what do you say?"

"It's Martha Lee surely. She's married on the sly. And who in the name of God is the fellow?"

"Not a one of me knows. But he's as country as they make 'em, ma'am. Did you ever see such a slouch of a walk?"

"Well, the longer we live the more we know. And for my part, I wish them luck."

"So do I, bedad. Good luck to every happy couple!"

The cronies separated.

The wedding party struck from the shops, making for

a row of small thatched houses on the outskirts of the town.

"Luke, step out, man alive! Why do you drag so much in your walk? Just fancy if mother—or still worse, father—met us face to face."

Martha's tone was bantering.

"I don't care now if I met the Pope of Rome," Luke Cusack answered, and he did not quicken his steps.

"Oh, Ellen, you do look glum," Martha cried as she glanced back at Ellen Noonan, who, with young Mulvehill, was bringing up the rear. "One would imagine you were returning from a funeral!"

"I fancy I see eyes peeping out from behind the curtains on every window, burning with curiosity," Ellen Noonan replied.

They struck across the road and knocked at a cottage door. It opened cautiously, to disclose the figure of Aggie of the tousled head, whose services had been secretly commandeered from the Lee household. Aggie had spent her morning preparing the wedding breakfast. Evidence of the fact was now revealed by the sudden vivid flash behind her back in the cottage, of the great sizzling of a pan. It was just the incident to appeal to the humour of the young people who had been through a very solemn ceremony.

"Oh, heavens!" cried the bride, "my wedding breakfast is on fire! Aggie, you traitor, look to the pan! Your congratulations can wait—the fry can't!"

They crowded in a laughing group across the threshold. The door closed on the outside world, they made merry in the white-walled, earthen-floored, sparsely-furnished, cottage kitchen, the chief apartment

in the home which Luke Cusack had secured for himself and his wife, the establishment to be kept up on a hectic capital and no income. It was one of the bold strokes of adventure which help to keep the world young, the blood of humanity sweet, the race from nodding into senility. Wise men and wise women outside would shake their heads, darkly moralise. Well, let them chew the dry cud of their ancient wisdom! For here was Martha Lee—now Martha Cusack—at the head of her wedding breakfast table, her eyes a glory, in their hidden fires their warmth; her body vibrant in its exquisite movements, its play of limb and muscle and seductive contour; her colour quivering on the verge of a dawning vividness, like a shy nymph on the border of a pool. And Martha was giving her tongue its way, her thoughts all their waywardness, her gestures their freedom, her laughter shining wings to beat in the air. Already her companions were privy to her mood, blithe spirit in the kingdom of the young. And on the table were good things to eat, things that were not measured by the clinical eye of the dyspeptic, but gazed upon by the eyes of a keen appetite. And who cared that the provisioning of the table had left the household capital more hectic than it had been? Surely not Martha in her morning glory? Surely not Luke Cusack who ate with such a prodigious appetite, his dry skin crackling to so much unaccustomed smiling, his heart filled with the infectious gaiety of these town folk, these lively spirits, these glowing contrasts to the peasant moodiness? And at the head of the table was Martha, now, by some recent miracle which already appeared a far-off thing, something belonging to a memorable

dream, his wife! Martha, like unto no other woman on the face of the earth, Martha, with all those hidden, mysterious charms which had haunted him ever since the day he had seen her standing at a shop window in Ballyrea, her head a little to one side! He looked at her with quick, long side glances, his near eyes lighting, and although his heart whispered to him that now she was his wife, these glances were shy; only for a moment did they become bold, in the middle of some outburst of merriment, and, leaning across the table, his face rarely but powerfully animated, he sought Martha's hand for a moment, squeezing it with a hot pressure; her eyes were turned upon him for a second, they met his, and fell. Then Luke leaned back in his chair again with a short odd laugh, and then resumed the devouring of the food. . . . And surely not Aggie who looked on from the fireplace, Aggie, who loved romances and weddings and cakes, and who loved, above all, Miss Martha? Aggie was not thinking of the storm which she knew would later break on the Lee household, and in which she herself would be romantically involved. For Aggie now and again had to hold on to the little mantelpiece over the fire, shaking with laughter when Martha mimicked somebody whom they all knew, or sent out some shaft of wit that made a local hit. Aggie was not chewing the dry cud of ancient wisdom because of this marriage. She was only saying to herself, "Martha will be the death of me as sure as the day!" . . . And not young Mulvehill, who had obliged his country cousin by playing the part of best man and praising his neck-tie! He was venturing an occasional raw witticism, his voice broken, like a cracked bell; his eyes dancing, setting Martha off

on fresh lines of attack. He was not chewing the dry cud of ancient wisdow because of this marriage! . . . And not Ellen Noonan, whose soul was at ease because the Church had, in her wisdom, sealed this marriage which was surely made in heaven! All the dogmatism of her mind had melted in the infectious good humour of the bride. . . . The morning flew. Somebody looked at a watch. There was barely time to catch the train.

At the door of the railway carriage Luke Cusack said solemnly, "Well, we have a grand day for it anyhow."

Young Mulvehill grinned. "You'd think," he said to himself, "he was going to weed a field of turnips."

Martha turned to Ellen Noonan. "So we must say good-bye, Ellen. It is a real parting this time. How can I thank you for everything?" There were tears in her voice now.

"Oh, nonsense, Martha," the other replied, a false briskness in her tone, "you are talking already like an old married woman."

"I know you were going against the grain all the same, Ellen. And I suppose I shall have an awful time when mother finds out."

"It would not be like your mother to be too hard on you. And she must be told at once, of course. I am going up straight from here to her."

"To tell her?"

"Certainly. I am the person who should inform her. I think it only right I should see her at once."

"Oh, Ellen, how good you are! You are always doing the right thing and I am always doing the——"

She pulled up in time, her eyes turning to Luke. But

Luke Cusack was busy with his own thoughts. Through the tumult of his marriage emotions was breaking like swishes of whipcord the hope that he had, by this act of defiance, shaken the household at Clonlea to its foundations.

The guard of the train produced his green flag, felt in his official breast for his whistle.

The two girls clung together in a quick embrace.

"Good-bye, Martha!"

"Good-bye, Ellen!"

The train steamed out.

IV.

Mrs. Lee wiped silent tears from her eyes. Mr. Lee plucked at his short, dark beard. Ellen Noonan sat solidly in front of them.

"What happened her at all?" Mrs. Lee was saying over and over again.

"She had too much of her own way," Mr. Lee replied steadily.

Then, after a pause, the questions were repeated and answered like a litany.

"What is the fellow's name, did you say?"

"Cusack, Luke Cusack."

"What Cusack is he? We never heard of them before."

"He is from Clonlea."

"Clonlea? That place over west, near the sea?"

"Yes."

"I never heard of the family before, never!"

"They are farmers."

"Farmers, indeed! Some miserable hovel by the side of the road. Hungry, starved people you may be sure. Ah, she has destroyed herself and disgraced us for ever."

Mrs. Lee looked miserably, vacantly around the room. The open piano, a piece of music on the rack, seemed to heighten the morning's tragedy in her mind.

"To think," she said, "of the education I gave her, all the money that was lavished upon her, the nuns in face of her for years, and now it all to end like this. I'll never look at her again, never!"

"I tell you she got too much of her own way," repeated Mr. Lee, plucking at his beard.

V.

Young Mulvehill, that same evening, hopped off a bicycle at Clonlea and broke the news to the family, distracted at the disappearance of Luke Cusack. The joy of the discovery, breaking in upon the long suspense, was rapidly followed by a storm of indignation.

A litany was recited in the kitchen.

"What is the person's name, did you say?"

"Lee—Martha Lee."

"What Lees are they?"

"Of Ballyrea. They have a shop."

"We never heard of the family. We never had any dealings with them."

"It is a provision shop."

"A provision shop, indeed! Some miserable hux-

tery! The boy is destroyed. Some town whipster has trapped poor Luke. He was too soft for the dirty town clan. We will never look at him again; he has disgraced us all."

Mrs. Cusack looked about the kitchen. The scoop on the bin appeared to bring the tragedy home to her.

"Ah," she said, "to think of him so willing for his work and so kind! They inveigled him, they inveigled him, surely." And with a profound conviction that she had hit on a word which explained everything and left no more to be said, she repeated in a dull, despairful voice: "They inveigled him." Mark went out while despair filled the kitchen, crossed to the little wicket leading into the garden. Brendan Nilan and Dominick were putting in some cabbage plants, the figure of the American in his white bauneen and grey trousers showing behind a row of currant bushes.

"Brendan!" he called.

Brendan Nilan came up the path, blundering of foot in his heavy boots, as if he had to do with top-dressing all his life.

"You've had news?" he queried.

"I have," Mark replied. "Luke has been discovered."

"On a spree?"

"No—worse."

"Burning the river for salmon?"

"No—still worse."

"Out moonlighting, then?"

"No—worse still."

"In an agricultural college, studying farming as a science?"

"No, no. He's gone and got married—secretly."

"Gee! Is that all?"

"Is that all! He's ruined himself. The women within are furious."

"Then who has he married—or who has ventured to marry him?"

"Some slut of a girl in Ballyrea. One of the town brood. Her name is Lee."

After a pause Brendan Nilan asked:

"Lee, did you say?"

"Yes, Martha Lee. I must go down and tell Mrs. Conneely."

He walked away. Brendan Nilan remained where he was at the little gate.

Dominick, peeping out between the currant bushes, was struck by the curious hanging figure on the little garden gate. He kept his eyes upon it. Brendan Nilan made no move whatever.

"I wonder," mused Dominick, "what Mark has said to him at all. He's knocked all the highcockalorum out of the little Yank."

And Dominick chuckled as he bent over the cabbages.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD PLACE OF THE MULVEHILLS.

MARK CUSACK pulled up the mare at the gate, jumped from the saddle and whistled. Dominick came running from the stable, and took the mare by the foaming head. Mark swung into the house.

Brendan Nilan threw down the book he had been reading when Mark looked into the room. There was an eager query in the face the American raised to him. Mark drew a long breath, mopping his perspiring forehead.

"Well?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"Gone through," Mark replied.

"What?"

"Fact."

"And the terms?"

"Twenty-two years' purchase."

"Hurroo!"

Mark turned out of the room and into the kitchen, Brendan Nilan after him. The old woman was by the fire, rocking from side to side on her seat, her lips moving, the beads of a great, brown Rosary passing through her fingers, her eyes a little strained. She might be some grim, ancient goddess fingering the decades of Time.

"The land is our own at last," Mark said.

The old woman looked up at him, but her lips went on moving. She finished her prayer, made the sign of the Cross, and put the beads away.

"What's that you say, son?" she asked.

"Twenty-two years' purchase," Mark replied laconically. He knew she had heard the announcement very well.

"And what about the grab?" Her tongue ran round her lips for a moment, like an animal which anticipates blood.

"It will be restored," Mark said. "The upland farm will be yours again."

A room door opened, and Mrs. Cusack came out, her eyes shining.

"I heard your words," she said, standing tense by the door.

There was silence in the kitchen. Nobody moved. Brendan Nilan glanced from one to the other—the old woman, a gleam, something almost of the tiger in her eye, Mark's eyes on the fire, Mrs. Cusack surveying the sky through the window.

"It's great news, surely," Mrs. Cusack said quietly at last.

They sat down about the fire, their air that of people who should have a great deal to say to each other and who found, now that the great hour had come—now that an agrarian nightmare had suddenly turned into a pastoral festival—that they had nothing to say. A great quietness was about them. The smoke curled up the chimney, a calf mooed at the back, a bucket rattled, fowls cackled, the sparrows chattered under the thatch.

"Tell us what happened at Ballyhague," the old woman said after a long silence.

Mark was trite, jerky, as he related what had been done and said at the conference at Father Hugh

Whelan's house, the conference between himself, the priest, and the land agent—the conference at which the purchase terms had at last been agreed upon. There was really very little to be said now that so much had been done! Another silence fell upon the group by the fire. And out of this agreeable silence, this intense companionship in an hour of deep emotion, there came the eternal disturbances, the irritant which marches with humanity in all its ways and in all its phases, the note of discord inherent in humanity itself. It expressed itself first in little nervous movements of Mrs. Cusack's fingers, in the twirling of her marriage ring on her finger.

Then it became vocal.

"I wonder what about poor Luke at all?" she said nervously. It had been almost an offence to mention Luke's name in the house since his foolish marriage.

Little scraps of gossip concerning him had come to them, as it were, on the wind. Without the subject being one of open conversation, a great deal was known to the household individually during the months that had elapsed since his marriage. His money had, of course, given out long ago. The honeymoon had bled the hectic capital white; a few twinges on the return, and there was only the memory of its blushes. Nevertheless, Luke was living in the little house in Ballyrea with his wife. Her people "would not look at her either." There was a certain admiration and a certain hostility in the household at Clonlea at this intelligence. Luke and his wife were, they heard, living very cheerfully, the wife great style, and Luke himself very important and serious. The only change observed in him by such neighbours as had

seen him was his habit of wearing a collar and tie every day in the week! Nobody knew for certain how they managed. Luke did nothing beyond accepting all the congratulations and refreshment bestowed upon him by his neighbours in Clonlea on the head of his marriage. Martha was all bustle about nothing and to be seen abroad frequently. They both behaved like any other young married couple, the order of their existence a splendid parody on people living on private means. This splendid parody was sustained, it was suspected, on certain visits from Aggie, who flitted, parcels in hand, from the Lee household to the little cottage at dark hours of the night. Mrs. Lee was, it was further suspected, privy to this alleged traffic with the establishment of Martha and her lord, though technically hostile to the marriage. As to Mr. Lee, he was supposed to know nothing about the traffic. Mrs. Lee and Aggie behaved as if the wrath of some fearful god would burst upon them, should Mr. Lee discover what was afoot. They smuggled things out of the house in a dread silence. Mr. Lee felt that this traffic was going on. He behaved, indeed, as if he were a terrible sullen god who would certainly pull down the skies should ever this thing become known to him. He sat in his room off the shop in a terrible silence, listening to the movements and the whisperings, the planning and the plotting, of the two smugglers in the kitchen and the shop. Well for them, thought the dreadful Mr. Lee in his little parlour, that he knew nothing about this business! If ever it come to his knowledge!—— Mr. Lee struck out his heavy limbs, leaned back on his chair, plucked at his black beard, and scowled darkly at the low ceiling.

"Father Hugh Whelan is very strong on the case of Luke," Mark Cusack said.

The old woman's face hardened, Mrs. Cusack fidgetted uneasily, the eyes of the American went to the fire. Instead of observing the others he suddenly became absorbed in some emotion personal to himself.

"What does the priest say?" Mrs. Cusack asked.

"He says that the upland farm should now by right be given to Luke."

"Given to Luke!" the old woman cried. "The farm that we bathed in our blood given to a man who has turned his back upon the land!"

"I don't know in what other way you can meet his case," Mark said, his expression moody.

"In the old days," said the grand-mother, "there was but one farm; it rose on the upland and went down to the river meadows. As it was, so let it now be."

"You are very hard on poor Luke, mother," Mrs. Cusack said sadly. "What sense had he after all? Many a one was inveigled like him. A bright angel once fell from heaven. We ought always to remember that."

Brendan Nilan sat back with a jerk in his chair, rocked his leg on his knee. He did not look as if he enjoyed the simile of Luke Cusack and the bright angel.

"Cut that out, Aunt Sara," he said.

"Do you think Luke ought to get the land yourself?" the old woman asked Mark.

"I do," Mark replied decisively, his swarthy face always extraordinarily like her own in these moments of decision. "It's justice."

"You'll be bringing a woman of your own into this

place," said the old dame. "There are two hardy ones already in it. Luke's beauty from the town will make a grand fourth. What man of sense has too many chimneys drawing on the roof of his home? Answer me that, Mark Cusack."

"I never said a word about quartering Luke and the wife in this place," said Mark. "The female furniture here is good enough as it is. You're a rich piece of mahogany yourself, gran."

"Well, then, where will you put Luke and the wife? In the barn?"

"No. Let there be a new house built on the grab."

"A new house on the grab?" Mrs. Cusack repeated.

"Where is the money to come from?" said the old woman.

"We will get money to stock the grab," Mark replied. "And money is to be had cheap now for building. We would have no trouble in raising it."

"Wouldn't that be grand entirely?" said Mrs. Cusack. The pastoral symphony had risen in her ears to a splendid crescendo.

"It might be grand," said the old woman, "if Luke was not a slack lad, married to the Lord only knows who. What way will a pair like himself and his helpmate look after a farm that his father gave his life for? If he had married a farmer's daughter, and she, maybe, without a copper to her name, there might be a prospect of her making it good to him in the rearing of calves and the feeding of pigs and the doing of the crafty things that come to a sensible woman's hands. But where's the use of talking of him, spancelled as he is to a creature who may and may not know how to peel a potato? Fine

farmers' wives are to be had in the town of Ballyrea, indeed; a place of damsels who redden the knuckles of their elbows gossiping over their counters. It's of old I know them!"

"We can't be going into that now," Mark said. "Whatever she is, Luke has taken her, knuckles and all."

"Where would the house be built?" Mrs. Cusack asked.

Instead of answering his mother Mark turned to the old woman.

"You know the beech trees?" he asked, as if it were she who had asked the question. He stooped a little over to her.

"I do know the beech trees," she said tartly.

"Well, beside them."

"Where——" The old woman's eyes lit suddenly.

"Exactly," Mark said. "Where the foundations of the old house are still to be seen in their bed of nettles."

The old woman began to rock on her chair, to hum in an almost imperceptible voice. Mark looked at her as if she were a top he had set spinning.

"A new house will spring up where the old house was," he added. His voice was the voice of the tempter.

"The old place of the Mulvehills," Mrs. Cusack said, her tone as emotional as the sentiment.

"Where I was born myself," the old woman murmured. Her gaze wandered.

"That is the spot," Mark said. "Won't it be some boast that the descendants of the Mulvehills on the mother's side will raise a new house on the hill? Won't

it be a great sight to see a new fire rekindled where an old fire was quenched in anger and in blood?"

The old woman rocked more spiritedly on her seat. Mark had appealed to the inherent peasant craving for knitting broken traditions. Here was a note of great victory in the land fight, a phœnix from the clay, a glory for the family. The old woman opened and closed her hands, as if clutching something.

"What can an old woman the like of me, swept into the chimney corner at the end of my days like an Autumn leaf in the wind, say against a man like you, Mark—a bud in its sap waiting to burst on the branch? Have your way."

Mrs. Cusack sighed a great sigh of relief. Luke, her black sheep, was coming back to the fold.

The sigh and its import stirred something in the tough old woman. She made a stroke at the hour of her surrender. She said:

"But I wish to God that the house was raised for somebody except a fellow who turned his back upon the land. I would put more trust in one who had turned his back upon the town for the land. If Mary's child——"

She turned her eyes on Brendan Nilan.

A little whine, a cry of pain, of protest, escaped Mrs. Cusack. Mark's expression became darkly moody. A light, cheerful, natural ripple of laughter from the American was like oil on the ugly agrarian waters stirring murkily in the moods and the glances of the family.

"When I build my nest," he said, briskly, "I guess I'll carry all my own sticks. And I don't have anybody on my branch—not even Mark."

Mark laughed, showing his strong teeth. The scowl went from his face. Mrs. Cusack sighed again. The old woman turned to the American.

"Ah," she said, "you have more than Mary's eyes in your head. You have her heart and her spirit within in the inside of you. God bless you, son."

"They will be coming to you to sign the purchase agreement one of these days," Mark said. "And in the meantime we must make friends with Luke and the wife. Father Whelan says the concert in the schoolhouse is a suitable occasion to make peace, to ask Luke and the wife out to Clonlea."

"The wife itself?" the old woman asked. "The new Mrs. Cusack, bedad!" She laughed a short, bitter laugh. She turned to Brendan Nilan, saying:

"And I never heard yourself with less to say, son. What do you think of Luke and the wife coming out to Clonlea?"

Brendan looked for a moment as if he were about to break into some strenuous declaration, checked himself, grew self-conscious, bit his lip and rose.

"I'm going right back to my book," he said, and left the kitchen.

The old woman looked after him.

"He has rings under the eyes," she said. "Dark rings."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONCERT.

MARK CUSACK and Brendan Nilan were returning from the schoolhouse, where they had been giving a hand at the decoration for the concert, when a side-car came along the road and drew up outside the house.

"It's Luke," said Mark, "and the wife. Lord, look at the big black hat of her!"

When they reached the car the passengers had dismounted. Martha was making something of a fuss about her wraps, and Luke, looking sheepish, was waiting on her. Dominick was holding the horse by the head, having dismounted from the dickey, where he had the delightful sensation of a jarvey on an important mission.

Martha smiled brightly at Brendan Nilan, and they shook hands. Luke, very self-important, said:

"This is my brother Mark."

Mark shook hands with Martha and said:

"You're welcome to Clonlea."

Martha smiled, then turned and looked at the house, a cool, calculating look, as if measuring the status of the race into which she had pluckily married.

"So this is where Luke was born," she said, and she said it as if Luke was some great celebrity whose birthplace had to be noted.

Luke turned on his stiff joints and said:

"That's the house right enough. And there's my mother waiting at the door."

Luke led his wife up the sanded path, his gait if anything more ungainly than ever. Martha moved in her splendid carriage. Mrs. Cusack, who looked as if she would run to Luke and throw her arms about him, suddenly pulled up, her eyes almost blinking as she regarded the gorgeous creature Luke led to her. She became almost deferential in her attitude, clasping her hands in front of her.

" Well, mother," said Luke, " here we are. This is Martha."

A formal hand-shake followed, and Mrs. Cusack led the visitors into the hall.

" What way is the old woman?" Luke asked.

" Grand," said Mrs. Cusack. " Never better in her life."

" Come into the kitchen," Luke said to Martha.

They went in to the kitchen. The old woman was tying an apron about her. She looked at Luke and at his wife.

" What way are you, gran?" Luke asked, and without waiting for an answer added, " this is Martha."

The old woman looked at Martha and Martha looked at the old woman. It was a deliberate, unashamed, searching scrutiny on both sides. And out of it there was a distinct mutual hostility. It was as if Martha said to the old woman: " And you don't like me. Very well, then. I care nothing for your opinion. You won't bully me, even though you're the head of this house." And it was as if the old woman said: " Well, you're great style and no mistake, but you're not going to intimidate me with your grand airs and your fashions."

"I hope you'll like Clonlea," said Mrs. Cusack.

"I hope so," said Martha, shortly.

"Why wouldn't she like it?" said Luke. "To be sure she'll like it."

"I hope Clonlea will like her," said the old woman. She finished the knot on the back of her apron and put out her hand for her stick.

Martha dismissed the speculation with a shrug of her shoulders. She looked round the kitchen curiously.

"Come into the room and take off your hat," Mrs. Cusack said, her face excited. She led the way into the room.

Luke looked uneasily at the old woman, who seated herself comfortably by the fire. She took no particular notice of Luke. She had not shaken hands with him.

"Well, granny," said Luke, a little sheepishly, and paused.

"What's that you say, son?" said the old dame. She spoke as if he had never left the place, as if his marriage and his wife were an illusion.

"What do you think of Martha?" Luke asked.

The old woman hesitated, and then, turning suddenly to him, asked:

"What height would she be?"

Luke shifted uneasily. He cleared something from his throat.

"She must be six feet," the old woman encouraged.

"Maybe she is," said Luke. "I never measured her."

"And her purse?" said the old dame. "Did you measure that?"

"No," said Luke, his near eyes glowering, "I did not."

"I suppose it would not be on the same proportion to her build," the old woman said.

"Maybe it would not," said Luke, defiantly. "And whether or which it only concerns herself and myself. We come out here because we were asked to come."

"I suppose now, ye find it hard to make out time to visit your friends," the old woman said. "Or maybe it is ye spend all your time going about on visits?"

"We go where we think we are welcome," said Luke. "If we're not welcome here, say the word."

He caught the lapels of his coat, his moody face darkened.

The old woman looked up and laughed, the short ironic laughter of age. She said:

"God love you, child, sure it is not for anyone to welcome you or not welcome you when you're coming back to your own. Is not Mark going to raise up a house on the hill for the two of you? Was not it for this men shed their blood in the struggle for the land? You'll be up there in the new house, you and Martha, and God increase you!"

Mrs. Cusack and Martha came out of the room. Mrs. Cusack still flushed, excited. Martha very vivid in a blue silk blouse, her hair neat and brilliant, a comb with pearls in it. She laughed in her soft tones as they came out. Evidently she and Mrs. Cusack were already on good terms. The old woman looked slowly and sceptically at Martha. Martha's eyes went to the old face, and rested upon it with interest and scorn, the harsh scorn of youth.

"What about the tea, Sara?" the old woman asked.

"In a minute," said Mrs. Cusack. She turned

politely to Martha and said: "Come out to the room and rest yourselves."

Martha and Luke followed her to the room. Martha sat down with a feeling of relief. Mrs. Cusack wiped her heated face with her handkerchief. A look of crankiness came into Luke's face. He had the feeling that he was being left to the mercy of the females of the establishment; their obscure agitations were, as far as he understood them, not agreeable.

"I see," said Luke, "that you have Nilan here all the time."

"Yes, he's here still," said Mrs. Cusack.

"He got pale," said Martha.

"That's the fellow," said Luke, "that elbowed me out of this place." His tone was one of grievance.

"We all thought you went of your own accord," said Mrs. Cusack.

"And I thought you came to me," said Martha, her tone bantering.

"No matter about all that," Luke said moodily. "I was not wanted in this place and Nilan was. He elbowed me out. And I'll take my book oath upon it he'll elbow Mark out, too. I can see it in his golden tooth."

Martha laughed heartily. The idea of reading a man's mind through an artificial tooth tickled her. Mrs. Cusack rubbed her hands nervously. She said:

"What does all that signify now? You'll have your own farm and place soon."

"Oh, the grab," said Luke, contemptuously, not to be done of his grievance.

"A new house and all," Mrs. Cusack added. "It's wonderful."

"It was about time something was done for me," said Luke. "I was always nothing, always the dirt under somebody's feet. And I'm shunted out of the way now, put on the grab."

His mother bridled. She said:

"You can consider yourself safe that you get it. And you may thank your brother. He could have kept it for himself if he liked—as many a one would have done."

Luke grunted, leaning over his knees, his head hanging, as if he were searching for a faded pattern of the carpet on the floor. His mother's eyes wandered to Martha, to see how she was taking all this. She did not appear to be listening at all. She was like one who closed her mind to all discussions about the land, who did not understand, and did not want to understand, anything of family agitations. Her eyes were wandering about the room, noting the furniture, taking in the prints on the wall, speculative, critical, as if she were telling herself what she would do, what re-arrangements she would make in the settled scheme of things, what she would leave, and what she would reject, if she were mistress of the place. Her eyes wandered to the window. Outside there was a shuffle of feet. "Ah," she said. "There is Mr. Nilan. How funny he looks!"

"Funny?" queried Mrs. Cusack.

"Yes, got up to look like a farmer."

Martha rose and walked to the window. But Brendan Nilan and Mark Cusack had gone round the gable to the back of the house.

When Mark and Brendan Nilan reached the kitchen the old woman had drawn over to the window, put on her spectacles, and was reading a weekly newspaper.

"Well," asked Mark, "did you see the visitors?"

"I did in troth," said the old woman, looking up.

"And what do you think of them?"

"Luke is Luke," she replied. "Not a joint loosened on him."

Mark grinned. Brendan Nilan moved to the room door.

"And the inveiglement?" Mark asked, softly, drily.

The old woman was prompt and bitter. She replied: "She's like the snail on the wall; everything she owns she carries about on her back."

Mark laughed and followed Brendan Nilan into the room. They made ready for the tea and the concert.

"Well, I'm damned," said Mark, opening the collar of his shirt.

"Indeed?" Brendan Nilan said.

"Luke above all men!" Mark exclaimed, rolling up his sleeves.

"What's the matter with him?"

"To have married that—that—that Countess."

II.

When the Cusack party arrived at the schoolhouse for the concert they found the room practically filled, and the curate, who had organised the entertainment, in a condition of deplorable demoralisation. A terrible calamity had overtaken him just on the stroke of the first great triumph of his mission. His sister, who was to play the accompaniments of the singers, had been stricken with a sudden attack of influenza and was now in her

bed, racked with pain. What were they to do? They had nobody to fall back upon. Another young lady had weeks ago offered to share the honours with the curate's sister, but the curate's sister, being a highly strung and talented lady, could not bear the thought of a rival queen at the piano. She had scorned assistance and ordered a new costume. Now the lady whose talents had been scorned in turn refused to come to the curate's assistance. She had become diplomatically and maliciously deliciously ill, and at the present moment was seated behind a window curtain down the road, observing the people passing to the concert and offering mental and passionate short prayers to various good-natured saints that the concert might be a complete and harrowing fiasco. Thus would heaven humble the proud curate's sister. People somehow turned to Mark Cusack in their difficulties. If he could not do anything he could certainly listen sympathetically. The curate explained to him that young ladies of musical talent were, in a place like Clonlea, very rare, touchy, difficult, and their sensitiveness became impossibly acute on the occasion of concerts or other public exhibitions. In consequence of this local female psychology the young curate was now staring disaster in the face, and he did not so much mind if Mr. Laurence O'Donnell, the famous Irish-American singer, were not coming. What would the great man think of them at all? Nobody to play his accompaniments! A God-forsaken place, Clonlea! Mark Cusack could make no suggestion. Brendan Nilan had almost offered his services, but he held back because he remembered Laurence O'Donnell sing in New York—a man of splendid musical temperament, a rare baritone, an artist in spirit and in style. And while

Brendan Nilan held back, Martha suddenly said, from the back of the group, "Perhaps I could manage."

The curate, if he had not been a curate, would there and then have embraced Martha and proclaimed her a deliverer. He flushed in sheer relief, and said: "Of course you can manage. How can I ever thank you enough? Miss——" The curate hesitated.

"Mrs. Luke Cusack," said Mark, with a comical air.

"Oh!" The curate was delighted; there was handshaking and congratulations. "Come and look at the music," he added, feeling a great relief. Even though Martha broke down at the piano it would not be so bad. Somebody would at least make the attempt. And Martha, not the curate, would bear the censure.

"Of course, you'll do splendidly," said the curate, leading the way to the platform. Sincerely and passionately he prayed within himself that, with the help of God, Martha would do splendidly. Thus was heaven, as not unfrequently happens in mortal crises, stormed by different partisans. And while other members of the family took their seats, Martha sailed grandly to the platform, and there, in full view of the audience, looked coolly and deliberately over the music.

"Who is to turn the pages for me?" she whispered to the curate. The curate's face fell. How could he think of everything? He had resolved hours ago to never, as long as he lived, touch a concert again. He had been sent out from Maynooth in the belief that it had given him the last word in all learning; and already the terrible conviction was forcing itself upon him that Maynooth had only released him to begin at the beginning of learning.

Martha walked down the three steps from the platform to the hall, and the curate, pale as a ghost, followed her. He had the feeling that he was being again abandoned. He had only been mistaken. Martha rejoined her relatives.

"What's wrong now, Father Tim?" Mark asked. "You look bad."

"Can't you manage after all?" the curate asked Martha.

"Oh, yes," said Martha. "But you don't expect me to sit down at the piano in my hat and jacket, do you?"

"No, of course not," said the curate, nervously. He sustained the pretence that Maynooth had given him the knowledge of all things. "Of course not," he repeated.

"She has to strip," said Mark. His mother began to shake on her chair. Her face scarlet.

"They always strip when they're going for the piano," Mark drawled in an innocent tone. His mother, unseen, dug him viciously with her elbow.

Martha hummed a little to herself.

Little beads of perspiration came out on the immaculate brow of the young curate. Luke sat back on his chair, scowling up at the deserted stage. A faint suggestion of golden tooth showed between Brendan Nilan's lips. People shuffled into the seats about them.

"Who is there to turn the leaves of the music?" Martha asked. "Some of the things Mr. O'Donnell is to sing are very long and very critical."

"I'm afraid——" the curate said, looking about vaguely.

"Perhaps I may be of use there," Brendan Nilan said.

"Do you read music?" Martha asked.

"Yes."

"Why not play the accompaniments, too?"

"No, I prefer to turn the pages."

The curate looked at his watch.

"It's past the time," he said, "and here is Mr. O'Donnell!"

Martha took off her jacket and her hat. Brendan Nilan assisted her, as nobody else seemed to notice.

The curate came to them.

Martha, neat and trim, ascended the platform, Brendan Nilan after her. They went to the piano and looked to the music.

"Well, I'm damned," said Mark Cusack.

Martha turned over the pages of the music.

"Are any of the things familiar to you?" Brendan Nilan asked in a low voice.

"Not one," said Martha.

Brendan Nilan looked at her quickly.

"You're not afraid of Laurence O'Donnell?" he asked.

"Not at all. Why should I be? I've chanced him."

Brendan Nilan said nothing, but he thought. "How well she looks! And how very like her all this is! I wonder if there will be a tremendous breakdown?"

The curate led Mr. O'Donnell on to the stage. The audience, very noisy up to this, became quiet. It was a very homely, indeed very bucolic assembly. The formalities were like angels' visits. But Mr. O'Donnell got a great reception. Only for Mr. O'Donnell there would be no concert. He had been on a visit to Ireland and

had come to see a relative of his who lived at the foot of the mountain of Knock Gorm. Mr. O'Donnell was immensely interested in Ireland, his relatives, and in folk singers. He had discovered several treasures already in the neighbourhood, including Maurteen Conneely. His desire to sing for the people was sincere and gave him immense pleasure. He walked over to Martha and Brendan Nilan, pleasant and humorous.

"I find," he said, "that they sent down the wrong music. I'm singing ballads only to-night. Here we are." And he held out a fresh supply of music.

Brendan Nilan said to himself, "And a very good job, too."

Martha looked up at the great man and smiled. The curate began to think that there was, perhaps, after all, something Providential in the unexpected illness of his sister. She might have become nervous at the last moment. She might have broken down under the stress of the emotions of the evening; a change in the programme at the last moment like this might have prostrated her. She was very highly strung. God was, after all, very wise in His own ways. All was for the best. This young woman at the piano looked very competent and very sure of herself. A change of programme did not seem to put any strain on her talents. Perhaps she had been educated abroad.

"This is the order I should like," said Mr. O'Donnell, propping some music up on the rack of the piano. "I will sing for forty minutes. Then we have some local people, and I wind up again. Had we better not keep them waiting?"

Martha said, "In a moment," stood up, gave the

stool a few twirls to raise it, and then seated herself, her figure almost masterful over the keyboard.

"How good she looks!" Brendan Nilan thought. Her hand had touched his once as they examined the music. It thrilled him. Something warm suffused her whole being. He did not feel in the least shy as they stood there by the piano in full view of Clonlea! Martha somehow gave one a feeling of optimism; a peculiar delightful sense of security, of pleasant comradeship, seemed to radiate from her sinuous body. She played the opening bars of a spirited ballad—"O'Donnell Abu"—with judgment, with precision, perhaps with too much precision. And then Mr. O'Donnell, who had naively selected this opening piece in compliment to his own name, let his voice thunder out over the Clonlea schoolhouse.

He had a powerful and delightful baritone. He had sung in great concerts and in opera in America. He was an artist of quite unique temperament. His stout, well-made figure, his face—large, plump, pleasant—expressive of all his emotions when singing, pleased his audience, won them at once. They had never heard such a singer before. The silence was tense as he held them. And he played upon their emotions in song after song, his response to their joy and their applause almost boyish in its simplicity and its directness. And Mr. Laurence O'Donnell had only sung for great city audiences for enormous fees. He sang to the people in Clonlea "because his people belonged to here," with joy and for nothing. He was as much moved as they were themselves. It delighted him to think that the people were whispering to each other, "And to think that is

one of the O'Donnells of Slieve Gorm, a relative of old Terry O'Donnell—glory!"

Martha played the accompaniments well. Mr. Laurence O'Donnell had at the beginning gone off as if it did not matter very much whether she followed him at all or not. Brendan Nilan saw Martha's figure stiffen, some vibration pass through it, when first the glorious voice broke about them. Then she seemed to get into it, to rise to something in the mood of the singer, to follow him with an instinctive and a certain sureness. They seemed to understand each other and do very well. And Laurence O'Donnell, after each of his songs, had politely inclined to Martha in acknowledgment of her services.

The whisper went round the room that the young lady at the piano was Luke Cusack's wife. More thrills. It was an altogether emotional night of it for Clonlea. Mrs. Cusack gazed up at the stage at her daughter-in-law at the piano, at her nephew beside her, and her feelings were altogether confused and overwhelming. She was pouring sweat in the hot atmosphere, and her neck seemed to grow elongated as the emotions of the night heightened.

Mark, one side of her, quite unmoved, looked tired, his swarthy, primitive face expressing nothing except occasional flashes of humour in a general boredom. The great singer sang to him in vain, for Mark, like so many practical people, was tone deaf and could scarcely distinguish the sound of one instrument from another. Luke, the other side of the maternal skirts, hunched out his unshapely shoulders, his eyes mostly on Martha, half shame-faced, and half proud of her conduct. There was

a local fiddler, a local flute player, a local lady school teacher to recite, and some folk singers. These folk singers—and especially Maurteen Conneely—made an extraordinary and quite unexpected appeal to Brendan Nilan. They touched something in his musical emotions which only very few great singers had moved in New York. He could not analyse his emotions. He was immensely taken by Maurteen Conneely's method of singing, even his voice, a light tenor, almost elusive in its quality, untrained, no doubt, but singing Irish songs in a peculiar, quaint, haunting style which was not like anything he had ever heard. Maurteen Conneely had struck a gawky attitude with his long frame on the stage, his eye staring tensely at the wall at the back of the room, and without accompaniment sang with an art that was as instructive and as traditional as the singing of birds. Brendan Nilan did not understand a word of the Irish songs, but they had a haunting and an immensely powerful effect upon him.

It annoyed him to think that the audience, for the most part, were not taking the singer seriously; perhaps it was his appearance, his familiarity, his gawky look, perhaps it was that the old strain singing was too near to themselves, close to their lives as a bog wind or the scent of turf smoke, and that, therefore, their inclination was to laugh at it on the stage. Brendan Nilan, nevertheless, felt indignant. There was something precious in the singing that would give these people dignity and distinction if they only knew it. His eyes wandered to the face of Laurence O'Donnell, seated now in a front row before the platform. The great singer was bending forward, his well-favoured, expressive face quite eager,

almost beaming in its enjoyment and evident delight. Then Brendan Nilan remembered that O'Donnell had come mostly in search of old songs and folk-singers. "I guess he knows what he's after," Brendan Nilan thought. And then it struck him as one of the incongruities of Ireland which were becoming known to him, that the only two people in the audience who were really moved by this folk-singing were both by birth Americans!

Of course, the audience clamoured for a speech from Laurence O'Donnell at the close of the concert. He frowned a little, smiled, then came forward. The people of Clonlea liked his singing, but they had a passion for speech-makers. They were anxious to hear how an American would do, whether he would be as good as a Member of Parliament or not, and, of course, they expected him to talk about the land and Home Rule. Nobody of any account ever talked about anything else in the opinion of Clonlea. And all oratory should be platform style of oratory, the political mannerisms which the Gladstonian Liberal campaigners in England had trained the Irish political campaigners in. To the astonishment of Clonlea, Mr. O'Donnell began to talk about music. And he spoke in an intense, quick, earnest way, in a manner that made no appeal to the "gods," and as he went on the people did not know what he was talking about, except, indeed, that he was praising Maurteen Conneely! Not a word about the land! And maybe he was not a Home Ruler at all! Not a reference to Mark Cusack or to Matty Donovan, the County Councillor, not to speak of Father Hugh Whelan or the member for the division! No doubt he made mention at first of the ties of blood which

bound him with Clonlea, and his delight to be among the Irish people. He thanked God that even in remote, out-of-the-way places, mostly along the rocky, lonely shores of the island, the people had preserved a love of song and music, and especially their own traditional songs and airs. What, asked Mr. O'Donnell of astonished Clonlea, could more ennoble a people than this? They had still a heritage in their ancient language and ancient songs which he implored them to preserve. "Don't give up your distinctive music," cried Mr. O'Donnell. They had heard a very fair sample of it that night from a young man whose singing had given him more joy that he could express. In that singing was the musical soul of Ireland. Keep it alive! Develop it, encourage it, make it part of your lives! Don't give it up for the imported jingles, the inanities, the banalities, the vulgarities, the mean things that had no meaning and no soul and no music. What could ever come from the cheap things of the music halls? If Ireland was ever to give the world music of distinction, of value, it would spring from the folk-music and the folk-singers. There was a deep well-spring, a source of inspiration, more valuable to them than even the classical music of other nations. They must have their own standards, their own national inspiration, and they had it, he believed, in the rich body of their neglected and almost unknown folk-music. Whence had the great masters of music of their countries—the immortal composers of Germany, Italy, France—drawn their inspiration? Had they despised the folk-singers? What had Wagner based his Parsifal upon? Where did he get inspiration for his Dresden Amen? Was it not sung for generations, countless

generations, by traditional singers? Did Beethoven despise the folk tunes when he composed his Pastoral Symphony? Was not a great composition based and inspired by one of their Irish folk tunes, *Nora Criena*? "And I say to you Irish Celts," said Mr. O'Donnell, gazing out over the silent, sceptical Clonlea audience, "that if your folk-songs and folk-singers are allowed to die out, the source is lost for ever to future possible great composers springing up in this country. They will be cut off from a rich source of inspiration, distinctively and peculiarly itself, of the essence and spirit and soul of your nation. Cutivate the folk-songs, preserve, develop the traditional singers, create a national atmosphere of song, of music, and if you do so, out of this may arise some immortal composer who will make all the world his debtor and bring distinction to Ireland. You have even as it stands in your folk-song, your old strain singers and singing, a beautiful flower of art. Don't let that die."

The people came out of the schoolhouse pushing and laughing and talking about the concert. They had enjoyed it, of course. Mr. O'Donnell was, no doubt, a tremendous singer. But all the same—why had they not got a good comic? A man who would have winked, walked up and down the platform, cut capers, shaken his eyelashes, worked the muscles around his comic mouth? If he stuck out his tongue they would have rocked with laughter in their seats. And as for the speech. Well, well, to be sure! A big, strong, healthy, respectable-looking man, half-way through life, to make a speech about music! Did you ever——!

The Cusack party came home in a curious awkward

group. Mrs. Cusack, Martha, and Luke first, Mark and Brendan Nilan some way behind. Luke was moodily silent, drawing his legs after him, his air that of a man who was grossly wronged. Martha was a little flushed, happy after her performance at the concert, flattered by the compliments of the American singer.

"Well, what do you think of Laurence O'Donnell?" Brendan Nilan asked Mark.

"I don't think much of him," said Mark.

"Did he not sing well?"

"Maybe he did."

"And did he not speak well?"

"He did speak well—too well. But he is not a steady practical man. He is just a sort of humming bird. I would not give a pinch of snuff for his opinion on any serious subject."

"No?"

"No—not anything that concerns the country."

"Does music not concern the country?"

"Indeed, faith, it does not. How could it?"

The American made an impatient burst ahead of Mark, then pulled up.

"Is there nothing in life for you but land?" he demanded, impatience, contempt, in his tone.

Mark Cusack looked at him and in turn paused. "Nothing but the land!" Brendan Nilan cried with a gesture of despair.

"The land and nothing but the land, so help me God," said Mark Cusack, fervently, simply, solemnly. They walked on after the others until they reached the cross roads. Here Luke detached himself to speak to some friends, and they went on without him. Once or

twice Martha looked back to see if he was coming after them, but there was no sign of Luke. As they reached the little gate, Martha allowed Mrs. Cusack and Mark to pass in first. She returned to Brendan Nilan, something uneasy in her eyes. "I did not like to ask the others," she said. "But is there a publichouse anywhere about?"

"Yes, about a mile down from the cross roads," Brendan Nilan said.

A look of anger, swift and expressive, passed over Martha's face. Then she followed the others into the house, Brendan Nilan bringing up the rear thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DAY AFTER.

LUKE CUSACK groped into the house sometime in the middle of the night. When he woke up he was conscious that it was daylight, that Martha was moving about the room. He blinked, turned over on his back, and lay there with his knees hunched up under the clothes. He turned his head on the pillow and looked at Martha.

In the straight streak of light from the little window there was a great flowing sweep of rich brown hair, something in its vivid sheen like the leaves of copper beech in the autumn. Otherwise there was no sign of Martha. That she was there, Luke knew. That she was bent forward from the hips, her head down, he could vaguely discern. Her right hand, holding a white comb, was moving with rapid strokes through the great tumbling masses of the hair, and the movement of the hand was like the movement of a white shuttle in tangled masses of threads. As the shuttle continued its movements some sort of order was evolved in the careless richness of the hair.

"You're up, Martha?" said Luke.

A little sound, something indeed like a grunt of assent, sounded from the copper glory.

"I was late in getting back last night," said Luke.

No comment. But the white shuttle stopped suddenly, gripped the hair half-way through its length, a firm,

throttling grip. The hair was brought under a marvellous control.

"You didn't wait up for me?" Luke said.

The gripped hair swung back in a brilliant streak and Martha's head shot up to the shaft of light. The hair fell like the tail of a filly down her back. In her mouth were hairpins. She took them out and laid them on the little dressing table in front of her. Her eyes sought her own reflection in the looking glass. She was in her dishabille. Luke's near eyes were upon her.

"Did they pass any remarks about me not coming in?" Luke asked.

"Your mother seemed uneasy," Martha said. "She went out to the gate several times to see if you were coming."

Her fingers were now building the hair about her head, fingers deft and quick.

"What kept you out?" she asked quickly and sharply but without looking at him.

"I met a few friends," said Luke.

The words sounded familiar to Martha. She had often read them in the local paper in reports of petty sessions; it was the defence in cases of what they ironically called "simple drunkenness" before the magistrate. It was the prelude to the fine of a half-crown, and some subtle expression in Martha's face, some widening of the fine nostrils, something that was scarcely as obvious as the raising of an eyebrow stung Luke with its scorn. His tongue moistened his dry lips.

"The people were praising you," he said to Martha.

"What people?" Martha asked.

"People in the locality," said Luke evasively. "Respectable people."

"What did they say?"

"Mrs. Lynch said you looked very ladylike on the stage," said Luke.

"Who is Mrs. Lynch?" Martha asked.

"The wife of Loftus Lynch, the best-off man in Clonlea."

"Is he a farmer?"

"He is." Luke considered a few moments, and added carelessly, "He has a shop as well."

"What sort of a shop? What does he sell?"

"Everything," said Luke. "It's a country shop."

"Does he sell Seidlitz Powders?" asked Martha.

Luke looked sharply at her. She was doing some buttoning, her face expressive of nothing in particular. "He does, I think," said Luke.

"And everything from that up to the 'Key of Heaven'?" Martha suggested.

Luke looked up at the ceiling and said nothing.

"Are the taps wooden or brass?" Martha asked.

"What taps?" asked Luke.

"On the barrels—Mr. Loftus Lynch's barrels of old malt."

"I suppose it's me breath," thought Luke. Aloud he said courageously:—

"They're brass."

Martha sat on the foot of the bed, and began to button her boots.

"Nilan is not liked," said Luke after a pause.

Martha made no comment.

"The respectable people of the place don't care much for him," Luke added.

"When are we going home?" Martha asked.

"After the breakfast," said Luke. "I want to have a talk with Mark about the business of the house and the new farm. Dominick will drive us to Ballyrea. How do you like the notion of coming out to live here when the house is built, Martha? Do you think it better than Ballyrea?"

"When we get back," said Martha, "the loaf of bread in the house will be stale. And the milk in the jug will be sour. There is nothing else belonging to us in Ballyrea that time can lay its hands upon."

"It's a rotten way of living right enough," said Luke, hunching himself up in the bed. His face took on it the expression of a man grossly wronged. "And then," he added, "to think of that fellow, Nilan, out here with the run of the place! He got on the soft side of the old one."

Martha moved to the window, and stood thoughtfully looking out there for a minute.

"When we come out to live here," she said at last, "I'll make father give me the piano. It was got for me, and there's nobody to play it at home now."

"Yes," said Luke, "the piano will sound grand when the calves and lambs and hens and chickens will be screeching for food."

Martha did not seem to hear—she gave a pat to her hair, tucked down her blouse, and left the room with a song on her lips.

Luke rose lazily from the bed and stood, with his thin shoulder blade-like behind the clinging material of the

nightshirt. He lifted the ewer of water out of the basin and eagerly, rapturously, put it to his lips.

When Martha opened the door into the kitchen it was filled with the noise of a systematic, machine-like crunch. The crunch came from a table at which the old dame, Margaret Mulvehill, was standing, her back partly turned. She was chopping up cabbages with a long-bladed knife. There was something powerful, masterly, in the way she made clean cuts of the head from the top to the bottom. The chopped stuff she was dropping into a basket beside the table. "I could never chop cabbage like that," Martha thought. "I suppose she has to do a great deal of it for the animals. I saw a most terrible-looking pig digging its snout into the ditches when we arrived yesterday. I never saw anything I disliked so much. It began with a swinish curl on the snout, and it ended with a sarcastic curl on the tail. I'll keep no pigs for Luke Cusack." Through the partly opened door to the back premises she could hear Mrs. Cusack's voice raised in sudden angry protest. There was a rattling, a kicking of pails, and then the foolish mooing of calves. Martha had an idea that all this portended some fearful ritual of calf-rearing in which Mrs. Cusack was wallowing. A dog barked, and Dominick's cracked voice, almost as grotesque as his appearance, joined in the dispute. Martha slipped along the hallway and out the front door.

The peculiar, unmistakable odour of the flowering currants greeted her. She did not like it. The shrub was associated in her mind with graveyards. When a child she had scented a flowering currant in a graveyard, and the memory remained powerful with her ever after.

We are all slaves to the chance influences of our environment. Martha walked along by the house, and as she did so the little wooden gate leading into the garden caught her eye. She made for it. And as she did so she caught a view of the garden, its narrow, indifferently kept path running straight down to a sloping place at the end which was one joyous shouting blaze of double daffodils, their heads swaying and nodding as if they had, like Luke the night before, "met a few friends." Martha's eyes kindled at the sight of the daffodils. She opened the little gate and passed in.

A man's form rose up from the clay somewhere behind a row of bushes, and Martha pulled up, then stood stock still, staring.

"Good morning," Brendan Nilan said. He raised his soft black hat politely.

"Oh, good morning," Martha said, recovering herself. "For a moment I did not know you."

She looked up and down the figure of the American as he came out of the broken earth to the path. He was no longer, Martha thought, like a farmer. He was worse! He was a peasant! He might be a fisherman. He might be a pauper out of a workhouse. He wore the white bawneen and the grey homespun trousers. He had strong, thick-soled boots, and he was blundering of foot as if he had to do with top-dressing all his life.

"I dare not shake hands," he said, smiling. He raised up his clay-bedaubed hands. The pink, manicured nails were buried. And, as he drew near and spoke, Martha thought that after all he looked more make-believe than ever. The peasant clothes were only hung on him. They could not obliterate his personality. It

was too vividly constituted for that. He was only a stage peasant. So Martha thought. And for Martha to think was for Martha to give some sort of expression to her thoughts.

"You startled me," she said. "You look so—so peasant."

"And why not?" he questioned. "Is this not a place of peasants? Have I not come from the blood of peasants?"

"Yes, but you are only pretending."

"When I live the life, do the work, enter the spirit, I am not pretending."

"That's all right," said Martha, "but you are not a country-bred man as Luke or Mark are countrymen. You were not born into it."

"It is not necessary to be born into it," he said. "Is a man born to be a monk? Well, I'm in my novitiate, I have given up the sort of world into which I had been born, made my submissions and taken my vows."

He smiled at Martha's wavering expression.

"You're—you're," she said, hesitated, her head a little to one side.

"Out with it," said Brendan Nilan. "Cough it up."

"You're a very funny sort of man from New York," she said.

"What should a man from New York do, then?" he demanded.

"Well," she said, "if he did not go round Ireland in a flying machine, he should at the very least wear goloshes." Her eyes fell on the brogues Brendan Nilan was sporting.

"Goloshes for the wet pavements," he replied. "Fly-

ing machines for the air. I'm right out for the cart and corn business, the plough in the earth. And brogues for the furrow. Whether one comes from New York or Clonlea, one has to carry common sense in one's pack. It is only in Ballyrea that the mind sprawls." He looked her square in the eyes. Their warmth heightened, a faint colour rose on the olive of the cheeks. And it was Brendan Nilan's eyes which, this time, wavered, travelling beyond her beauty as if its glow in the April light was more than his self-consciousness could stand. Martha's gaze passed from his embarrassment to the daffodils at the end of the garden.

"I came here like a thief," she said. "On robbery bent."

Brendan Nilan's gaze came back to her.

"The daffodils," she said. "I wonder would they be very angry if I took some of them?"

"Aunt Sara would be glad to smother you in her daffodils," he said. "She's quite proud of you, especially since the young priest at the concert gave you his ecclesiastical approval. You must know that Luke is the apple of Aunt Sara's eye." They moved down the garden to the daffodils.

"But what about the old dame, the boss?" Martha asked.

Brendan Nilan smiled. Martha frowned.

"She's the real peasant, what no educated person could ever become," Martha said with some sharpness. "She's ignorant and narrow-minded, and her life must be sordid, hobbling round a kitchen chopping cabbages for pigs, saying cutting things, hating to see a young

woman well dressed. There's the peasant, the ignorant peasant."

"Wrong, all wrong!" cried Brendan Nilan with some excitement. "Margaret Mulvehill is a splendid, a rare old woman, a seer, a philosopher, a female intelligence, a will, a holder of power, a ruler."

"She's ignorant," Martha insisted.

"Not she. She can speak two languages. She's got a tremendous memory. She knows the poetry of Oisin. She can tell you the heroic stories of Fionn and Cuchullain, all come to her orally, held by her orally. Her English is not Chaucer, but clean from the wells of Chaucer. When it is not that, it is from the Irish of the bards and the great talking men. Her mind is clear and sharp and decisive. No mental sprawling about Margaret Mulvehill! She's hard. Her philosophy, but she does not know it, is the philosophy of Nietzsche humanised. I sometimes listen to her in wonder, I hear the voice of Zarathustra, 'Brethren, I say to you, be hard, be hard!'"

"Please get me some daffodils," Martha said, crisply.

Brendan Nilan stooped to the flowers and with a laugh began to gather them casually. Martha endured the deed while some of the flowers were being snipped.

"Stop it, stop it," she exclaimed suddenly.

Brendan Nilan looked at her in surprise.

"Am I not on the right beat?" he asked.

"I hate to see a man gathering flowers," Martha said. "It is just butchery. See how you have broken them off half down their stems. Is that the way to do it?"

"It is the way I did it, anyway," Brendan Nilan replied.

"Leave it to me," Martha said. "It looks like murder to see you whipping them off anyhow. This one looks exactly as if it were beheaded—chopped across the neck."

Brendan Nilan observed her as she gathered the flowers. It was like an act of devotion. Her supple body bent to the green embankment and her hand took the daffodils at the extremity, her gestures more a caress than a snap. She conveyed an extraordinary sense of love of the flowers in her movements.

"When I get back to Ballyrea," she said, "I will put these in a vase, and the vase I will have on the deal table in the kitchen. Everything we have is in that kitchen, and it is the most beautifully sparse kitchen you ever saw. No overcrowding in our house. There it is rigid and bare and clean, the white deal table on the bright floor, and on the white deal table a tall brown vase, and in the brown vase these long green stems holding up their golden trumpets. And there I will sit looking at them, listening to the music they blast from their trumpets, music of the fields and woods and April winds, and cows slipping by on the grass and birds flashing their wings. And all these trumpets will be crying 'Clonlea, Clonlea, Clonlea,' so that I may forget Ballyrea and think only of the sweep of hills and the new house that men will be raising up on the slope of the redeemed land. Oh, any woman who has the mind can make her own fairy tales with a deal table, a brown vase and a bouquet of daffodils."

Brendan Nilan stooped down beside her.

"May I not gather some now," he said, "having seen what I have seen and heard what I have heard?"

"If you promise not to take any more innocent lives," she said.

He gathered some of the flowers, carefully taking them at the end of their stems.

"That's better," she said, accepting what he passed her. "You show signs of improvement. You are an intelligent peasant, but a very bad New Yorker."

A strand of her loosened hair got caught by a vagrant wind and whipped him smartly on the cheek as he stooped to the earth. His frame seemed to grow tense, rigid, at the touch of the hair, then, what she had never noticed before, a pink flush mounted his face.

Martha put back the offending hair, her fingers deftly hiding it away somewhere behind her head. While she did so she hummed a few absent-minded little notes in an undertone, and she was thinking to herself, "He's really frightfully shy, and I wonder if I am a married woman. Dear, dear, what a strange world it is!

On a thorn bush beyond the daffodils a yellow-hammer perched, and began to drone out its weird little song.

Brendan Nilan moved away from Martha a little.

"What a curious song that yellow-hammer has," he said. "He comes there every day and goes over and over it for hours, appearing and disappearing at intervals. Sometimes another one comes and pecks at him, but he begins it all over again. Dominick says they have a nest in a hole in the wall."

"Do you not know what he is singing?" Martha asked. "Have you ever heard the words of a yellow-hammer's song?"

"Never. I didn't know it had words."

"Oh, yes," Martha said, and she chanted the words in a straight little run, dropping the last word to a lower note, making a whimsical parody of the bird's song.

"'A-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-more-cheese!' That is the song of the yellow-hammer."

"Well, I'm not surprised his wife comes out of the nest now and again to peck at him."

"You know very little about the country after all," Martha said. "How long are you here?"

"Something over a year."

"You've a lot to learn yet."

"No doubt of it."

"And when I come out to live here—bringing my deal table and my brown vase with me, of course—I may take you in hands."

"That is something to look forward to."

"And I think I have quite enough of the daffodils. Such a fine big bunch!"

"There are plenty about the place."

"Besides," she said, turning for the gate, "I am getting very hungry."

"Have you had no breakfast?"

"Not yet. Had you?"

"Hours and hours ago. We are all about at cock-crow."

"Then Luke and myself must be a scandal to the household?"

"Visitors are privileged."

They turned up the path. And there at the end of the path, leaning on the wooden gate, was Luke, his arms spread, his chin on his arms, stooped forward, his near eyes upon them like the eyes of a setter.

Brendan Nilan looked at him uneasily. Martha laughed her soft laugh. They were still out of earshot.

"There is the peasant again," she said. "See how Luke leans on the gate. You could never lean on a gate like that. There is blood and tradition, generations of practice, in that simple act. His ancestors have mooned over gates just like that for centuries. He does it as others sing the folk-songs."

"Good morning, Luke," Brendan Nilan said, as they reached the gate. Luke had never budged an inch from the spot.

"Good morning, Brendan," he said, drily.

"Well," said Martha, "you're not frozen on to the gate, are you?"

"No," Luke replied, "I'm not." But he made no move. His eyes went to the bunch of daffodils in her hand.

"I have taken liberties in the garden," Martha said.

"So I see," said Luke.

"How grumpy you are!" Martha said, lightly, putting the flowers to his scowling face playfully.

Luke's hand reached out and caught her wrist in a hard, tight grip.

"Give them to me," he said.

"Why should I?" Martha asked.

Brendan Nilan held back a pace.

"I want them."

"Oh!" Martha cried, in a suppressed little squeak. It was evident Luke's grip was more than playful. Martha released her hold. Luke bent back from the gate, spun round on his heel, and, with a drive of the arm, sent the daffodils over the wall into the farmyard. For a few

seconds they were vivid in the air, like a little flock of orange birds with long green tails. Then they sank behind the wall. There was silence for a tense second. Martha's eyes were bright with a light that was a pain.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded, her breath quickened.

"Because," said Luke, his voice a very crankiness in its drawl—"because we're not going to take anything from this blasted place only what we're entitled to. No, not a pinch of dust, not as much as a daffy-down-dilly."

Mrs. Cusack came in her quick step out from the porch at the front of the house, then called out briskly:

"What about your breakfast? I never felt you slipping out of the house. Come along while it's hot."

Luke turned and walked up to the house, and Martha, after a moment's hesitation, followed him.

Brendan Nilan went back to his broken patch of earth in the garden.

A few hours later, Luke and his wife drove off to Ballyrea.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRENDAN NILAN'S LETTER.

Six months after Brendan Nilan had left Clonlea to enter the agricultural station at Atherton, Mark Cusack was crossing the hill field when a shrill whistle from the direction of the road made him turn round. A rural postman was leaning over the wall with a letter in his upraised hand. Mark strolled down and took the letter. A glance at the handwriting of the address told him it was a letter from Brendan. He tore open the envelope and read the letter as he slowly ascended the hill field. It was as follows:—

"My Dear Mark—I have finished my six months' course here. I think I have benefited by it. Indeed, to be frank with you, it has helped to convince me greatly of the wisdom of my decision in not settling down in a raw condition at Clonlea. I could never have lived down the feeling that there I was a fake, and that a fake I would continue to be. I don't think there is any condition on the top of this green earth more sorry than an amateur farmer. I had often a feeling in the garden that not alone was Dominick laughing at me, but that the very eyes of the potatoes blinked every time they had a look at me. Well, they don't blink any more. I think they will understand now that I have a knowledge of them that may command toleration, if not respect. When I start sprouting the early specimens months before you would ever dream of touching

them, they may even guess that I am in a fair way to becoming their master. But of my plans I will not now speak. You know, Mark, that I disliked all the jawing about the land, while nothing much else was done for the land in Clonlea. It seemed to me a great waste of energy and temper. I hoped to escape it by retiring to this haven of work. Not a bit of it. I found the station up against the same difficulty. The bosses here were cracking away at the eternal question. Professors and students talked about it. The only difference was that they were at the other end of the question. That did not help me any. The peasants round about had their backs up. They were represented to me as a sort of bloody cut-throats. The police were swarming about the place, as if we were to have a first-class row at all hours of the day and night. I often felt as if I would like to see a set of new people come along and shoot down the whole pack and dice on both sides and give the land a chance. I guess parasites of one kind or another will never do any good for this country. I often thought they were all parasites, peasants and peelers, professors and probationers, students and bummers. The darned cocks only appeared to crow when they got a fee for it. But I got used to it all. I pegged away, and first impressions gave way to some understanding of the jawing matches, though I am still of opinion that the ploughing matches would be a good substitute for the sake of the country. But don't conclude it was all jawing with me. I wish you could all come here for a spell. There is no man so wise in his business that he cannot be made wiser. Take it from me that the man who tells you he knows everything about his profession is a humbug. The far-

mer who says he cannot be taught anything about farming is only a fool. I have often observed the little tits hopping up the back of a tree grubbing for insects and the like. They often think they are the tree. *Verb. sap.*

"I'm talking on a top note, don't you think? I suppose it's the environment. If I can't make anything out of the land I may be able to turn professor. I'm nearly cocksure and dictatorial enough for it already, you'll say. I remember a man in America who got the chicken fever. Went into the country and set up all the latest improvements—runs, incubators, movable coops and God knows what. All the latest patent foodstuffs, guaranteed to make hens shell the eggs out, were stocked. Damn the egg a hen ever laid for him. They just gobbled up all the grub he could hand on to them, and then squatted about the gilded apartments. They had a good time. This man used to lecture a pack of dirty Russian peasants who were his neighbours. They would come to see him in the evenings as if he were a circus. They kept chickens, but treated them what he called cruel. All the same the chickens of the Russians shelled out the eggs first-class. Well, our friend got broke. Was sold up duly. But, mind, he was an American. He wanted his own back of them darned chickens. And he got it. Became a writer for the papers on the scientific management of poultry farms. So if I fail as an agriculturist proper—who knows?

"Anyhow here's what I want to say. I'm not going back to Clonlea yet, Mark. I wish I could, I want to feel the clutch of your old paw badly. And I grew into that landscape wonderfully. Lonely and all as it was, I

got to feel the joy of it, the quiet of it. God never made those hills, and that mountain, the trees, the river, the hedges along the road, to chill a man's heart. They warmed mine. I had a sense of the colour, of the beauty of it all, of the atmosphere it created, that at times made me cry out that it was good to be alive. I grew to love it all, to love the life it held, the civilisation it enshrined, as one might grow to love a great poem. I don't think any man can ever be lonely who has a vision for the beautiful. I tell you, Mark, I lived poems at times in Clonlea. I was becoming so susceptible to the life about me that the light could not fade in the hills but that I was conscious of it and alive to the mystery and hidden things it expressed. Not that Nature was the only thing to which I responded. No, indeed. I have often talked with an old man in the road, and through him I got a new pair of eyes to look out on humanity, fresh understanding of life, the elements of a new philosophy. It seemed to me that the peasant life of the place was nearer to the great humanities than any other life I had ever struck. I got to understand the pathos of the cry that sprang from some of the searching outposts of civilisation, "Back to the Land." That cry worked itself out from some tradition that lived through the evolution of man from the wheelbarrow to the aeroplane. Its tragedy was expressed in the way it became frozen into a permanent heading in the newspapers. The people from whom it came never get back to the land in the sense that the people of Clonlea are of the land. They must bring back with them many of the things that have, in the course of civilisation, become part and parcel of their burden,

their blood. I experienced that in my own person, though I think I am nearer to the land than most of them. In my case it asserted itself in the feeling that I was a fake. I may live it down, and I mean to live it down. The generation that follows me may, if I succeed, get back to where my mother left the tradition when she left Clonlea for the United States. They will not, doubtless, have the keen susceptibilities that I have for some of the more artistic—shall I say?—appeal that the life makes to me, for it takes the city child to see some of the things that are lost to the eyes of those who are inured to the life of the land from childhood. But they will be of the land for all that, more than I can hope to be. My temperament, the artistic appeal it makes to me, has its beauty, and I pay back in one mood what I gain in another. I am on the loom that sends the shuttle from side to side, conscious that the fibres are being drawn out of my being to make the frieze of a new life. That is a little act of faith, Mark, that you will understand. You will recognise that it is a continuation of some of our talks late at night. You will also recollect that it had always to give way to the facts of everyday life when the sun rose on a new day. It is, perhaps, brooding of the spirit, a gathering up of impressions of the subconscious mind spread over months and years rather than any sudden revelation. It must give way to the pressure of the fact of the vital moment. As I say, I am not returning to Clonlea just yet. The reason is this. While under tuition here certain things got hammered into my head. When our instructors came to business I gradually began to grasp the fact that they were doing a lot of grafting rather than rais-

ing things from their native roots. Phrases such as these began to sing in my ears: 'Now in Denmark the people'——; 'How did we come to get beaten in that line? Because the Belgians'——; 'When I was in Denmark I found'——; 'The committee that investigated the matter on the spot in Belgium'——; 'This enabled the Dane'——; 'The Germans hit on the plan and set about organising'——. And soon the Danes and Belgians seemed to be pretty well pumped out over the Station. The Germans came next. I resented the fact that the Americans were nowhere. I said so one day. They did not bluntly say it, but America was treated with the caution due to a freak country. The Yanks were Yanks, and there you were. It set me wondering how many centuries it takes a new race to be taken seriously. The very velocity of the Yanks in progress only seemed to put them the more out of court in the sober councils of European agriculturists. The largeness of the country, the difference in the conditions of climate and soil were a further bar. These bars must be genuine enough. But I guess when Denmark and Belgium are thoroughly grafted to the Irish problem there will be a call on America. Once I asked if Ireland came in anywhere. Again there was caution. Certain time-honoured virtues were owned up to the credit of the old naked party called *Caitlin Ni Houlihan* when she's doing the line and light business. Considering that we were messing about one of her four beautiful green fields, she could not very well be excluded right off the programme. There she was anyhow. Then I was told 'Irish agriculture was neglected, it became largely obsolete. This was due to the fact that the clock stopped

on Irish farms when the land tenure question became acute. The very meadows were spiked and '——I stuck my fingers in my ears. I saw we were full sail ahead, all our canvas out, for the old jawing tack. I accepted everything about Ireland afterwards, a holy horror upon me that I would once again provoke the appearance of *Caitlin*, a rusty reaping hook in one hand and a dripping bloody peeler's baton in the other. Anyhow the evidence in favour of the Danes and Belgians was overwhelming when it came to close quarters.

"Besides the verbal information, it came to us through the mail in official documents, in pamphlets and tracts, in statistical compilations, in diagrams, photographs, and journalese. In face of all this, Mark, I grew anxious, became broody as an old hen who wants to bring out a brand new clutch. I just wanted to put my paw on the Danes and Belgians for myself. It was not enough that other people shook them up for me. I was anxious to do away with the interpreters, as I was to go direct to the language for the sake of the Lament for Burke. First hand for me every time. If Danish and Belgian professors were imported, perhaps I would have been satisfied. But when I got the Danes in Scotch and the Belgians in Cockney I thought I would have it for myself in Celto-Americanism. 'In Denmark they do it verra weel,' and 'In Belgium the farmer 'es all roight,' was not satisfying. I wanted to feel right up against him. Well, what do you say to me—that is a phrase from Dominick—if at this crisis I did not hear from the pater from New York. He had a little of my money that I left him to spec. He has been at it all his life more or less. He has never been a corner-maker, but,

on the other hand, has never been so fresh as to allow himself to be burst up. This time he hopped on the right leg. Had his little finger in the rubber boom. The news was agreeable to me, likewise the enclosed draft. Through it I saw my way direct to the Danes and Belgians. So I'm going right through with the study on my own. I do not propose going to Clonlea beforehand, for reasons that I will go into, perhaps, some other time; I prefer to start right from here. Give my love to the old woman and to Aunt. Make my intention known to Luke and his lady and to all those in Clonlea who have a thought for me. Some day in the future I will pay you all my respects. Adieu, Mark, adieu, my friend and companion.

"BRENDAN."

Mark Cusack had leaned over the low wall at the top of the hill field to finish the reading of the letter. He folded up the thin sheets of paper that it was written upon, then looked down the valley, and a mist came over his eyes.

"Not coming back, not coming back, gone." The words kept thumping in his head with a sense of pain. Then a little burst of passion, of emotion, swept him, and his heart cried out, "I wish he had never come. I did not think he would mean so much to me. He has made me restless like himself. Why should I not go somewhere, too? Am I to be like a goat tethered to a stake driven into the road in this place?"

Some noises and voices across a field woke him up, and he turned round. The new house, square, and cold in its grey-blue limestone, was standing sharp to his

view. The white, unslated rafters on the roof gleamed in the clear air. The figure of a man on the scaffolding was silhouetted against the sky-line. Two other men were out from the house looking up at it from the ground. Something in the figure of one of them made him smile a little bitterly. It was the figure of Luke, his hands in his pockets, his back stooped, his attitude helpless. He had come out from Ballyrea to have an eye to the house they were building for him and for Martha. Mark had a grim impression that his duty—his life—was mapped out for him on the farm. He put his hand on the wall and vaulted over it and went up to the house with energetic strides, his face more set, his manner more direct, his vision restored.

"They're very slow with it," Luke said as Mark came up, his tone complaining. "They ought to make more haste."

Mark made no reply. He shouted up some commands to the workmen. There was a little controversy between him and the figure on the scaffolding. Luke stood by while it went on, a smouldering scepticism on his face, his hands buried in his pockets.

"Brendan is going to Denmark," Mark said, turning suddenly to him.

"Is he indeed?" Luke asked with some indifference. Then after a pause: "What's bringing him there?"

"To complete his studies."

"What studies?"

"Farming—agriculture."

A grin rose slowly on Luke's face.

"Who ever heard tell of such a thing?" he said.

"It must be to train himself to sing songs he's going. No one ever went there for anything else."

"Well, he's going for something else."

"Don't give that out to the people. He will make a laughing stock of us if you do."

"The people be damned," Mark broke out with some heat. "He's worth a cartload of them."

"He'll turn into a nightingale," Luke said. "He was made for it with his slender throat and his golden tooth."

The rattle of a car down on the road broke in upon the conversation. They turned about to see a woman dismounting from a sidecar.

"It's Martha," Luke said. "What's bringing her?"

Martha Cusack came running lightly up the hill to the house. Luke walked some way to meet her, his step dragging.

"Luke," she said, breathlessly, as she came up, "I've news."

"What is it now?"

"Father and mother—they've given in."

She shook hands with Mark and took some breaths, tapping her throat. The colour on the face was heightened, her eyes were glowing, some strands of hair were blowing about her. Mark stared at her with some wonder. He regarded her as a butterfly, slender and strange, blown up by the wind on the bare hillside.

"They sent for me," she said; "Aggie came bursting in the door with the news. She barked her shin on a stool before she could pull up. So I put on a clean blouse, did up my hair, carried a green parasol, and sailed into them. They wanted to make a kind of wake of it,

but I cut that out of the programme. Instead, I made an apple pie for the dinner, and broke the speckled blue jug. Mother was panting round the house and father came in from the shop to say I could have the mahogany chest of drawers and some of the chairs with the good legs, when I come out to live at Clonlea. 'Thanks, sir,' said I, 'and I'll also relieve you of the piano.' My God, look at the man hanging over the rafter. He'll fall and break his neck before my eyes. And the house——"

She pulled up conscious that her tongue was likely to carry her into trouble.

"Well, what do you think of the house?" Luke asked.

"I suppose I'll get used to it," Martha answered. Mark laughed, amused at the long face Luke pulled.

"It's two stories, anyhow," Luke said in a sort of defence.

"We'll have an upstairs," Martha cried, her eyes dancing, "and the whole country and the heavens and the stars in front of us."

"You will have a glimpse of Galway Bay from the west window," Mark put in.

"What!" Martha cried. "A view of Galway Bay from my bedroom window! Lord, Luke, I'll fancy myself picking cockles again with a spade and a shovel, bare legs in the water, small crabs tickling my toes, and biscuits and a bottle of porter at twelve o'clock, the same as we used to have when we were taken to Salthill in the summer, long, long ago."

"There's a great blast that does be rising out of the west in the winter," Luke struck in. "The sash in the west window will be rattling in the rain from the autumn out."

"Let it fire away," Martha replied, "I'll be rattling the piano when I feel the blues coming on. That's why I wanted to secure it from father."

She turned swiftly upon Mark, catching a certain look in his eyes. She gazed upon his sturdy, capable figure, his white bauneen, his grey homespun, his clear-cut face, his attitude of latent physical energy.

"Heavens, you look such a terrible peasant," she cried impetuously, to Mark's great amusement.

"And you say nothing, only I'm sure you are expecting me to do it. Well, I tell you I won't. I'll refuse point blank. I've simply made up my mind on the point. I won't budge if they were howling at my heels with the hunger twenty-four hours of the day.

"Won't what?" Mark asked.

"Won't feed the pigs. Here's for the west window."

"Martha," Luke cried with some concern as he saw her mount the ladder to the scaffold.

"All right, Luke," she called back, the sinuous body working its way from rung to rung.

"Just keep back, please, till I'm well on to the landing."

Mark put his hand over his mouth, a crude method to prevent laughter which a sort of etiquette demanded in Clonlea. They watched her walk gingerly along the scaffold, and then disappear round the gable. Luke by this time had gotten his hands out of his pockets, and was showing some signs of excitement, the pink flush coming on his face, his narrow eyes shining. "I declare to God," he cried, "she'll kill herself." And he ran up the ladder with an alacrity that astonished Mark. Mark followed more slowly. He found them standing

on the platform before the west window. Martha had her hand up shading her eyes. An inlet of the bay shone in the distance.

"Well?" Mark asked at last.

She did not seem to hear him. She leaned a hand on Luke's arm and sighed a little.

"Luke," she cried softly, "I think I'll grow to love this place."

Mark walked away, watching the work and speaking to the men. After a time Martha and Luke came along. Luke was dwelling upon the different points in the construction of the house. In a lull in the conversation Mark turned to Martha and said: "I had a letter from Brendan to-day. He's going to Belgium."

"Indeed! For how long?"

"He did not say."

"What is taking him to Belgium?"

"To learn the farming there."

A lone croak of a laugh sounded from Luke.

"That's an excuse, I expect," Martha said. "He must be a rover."

"He'll never come back. He won't be seen again," Luke said with some satisfaction.

"Well, I suppose we can't help him," Martha said, with ready resignation.

A certain expression of sadness settled on Mark's face, not altogether free from a scowl. Martha observed it.

"Oh, is that what has you in the blues?" she asked. "Cheer up."

"He asked me to mention that he was going," Mark said, slowly. "Perhaps, only he did, I would have held my tongue about it."

The want of sympathy in Luke and his wife nettled him.

A shout sounded from the house at the foot of the hill. Mrs. Cusack stood there, beckoning with her arm.

"The dinner's ready," Luke said. "They were not expecting you, Martha. You'll have to take pot luck."

"I don't mind in the least," Martha replied, "I had almost forgotten about your mother."

Her spirits seemed to droop as she made her way along the scaffolding to the ladder. Suddenly she tipped Mark on the shoulder.

"About your grandmother," she cried, "would you mind going in before us and say something to her? I don't want to have a scene with her. I'll simply go for her if she grunts at me."

Mark stood suddenly, and something in his expression gave Martha pause. She looked at him with a new, and almost startled gaze. She was conscious for the first time of the will power of the man. She almost shrank back from the cloud that gathered on his face.

"Don't speak of the old woman again like that," he said. "At least not to me." And Martha was aware that his gaze travelled over her shoulder to Luke as he stood behind her. Without waiting for a reply, Mark ran down a gangway and strode down a hill to the house beside the road.

"Now, Martha, you are always tying up knots with your tongue," Luke complained, his voice cranky.

"I am," Martha said, some uneasiness and repentance in her voice, "but I never meant to——"

"It's not what you meant. It's what you said."

"Oh, he'll get used to me," she laughed again in her

buoyant way. Luke shook his head and followed her movements anxiously as she descended.

Mark shrugged his shoulders as he crossed the yard to the back door of the house. "Well, I'm damned," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

GALWAY BAY.

MARTHA was right, Mark Cusack got used to her. When she and Luke set up house on the hill the little misunderstandings grew less and less frequent. Mark got out of the habit of thinking of Luke's wife as some strange thing that had got blown in upon the farm. As the months went by, he came to regard her with much good humour. There was, of course, intercourse between the two families, and Mark shed his prejudices as he saw Martha playing the part of housewife, and playing it not at all too badly. Nothing remained except the hostility of the old woman. Mark often thought that his grandmother never really got over her desire to see Brendan rather than Luke established in the new house. Luke, as he had half expected, did not make the most of his opportunities on the farm, and when complaints were made as to his slackness, the old woman shook her head and muttered under her breath. Indeed, it was only the fear of rousing the anger of his mother that restrained the old woman from saying scathing things of Luke.

Luke and Martha had been something over a year living in Clonlea when Mark Cusack and Maurteen Conneely, one Sunday morning, crossed the fields with two greyhounds held in straps. As they were passing Luke's house, Martha came to the door. They exchanged some greetings:

"Were you at early Mass?" Mark asked.

"I was," Martha replied. "Luke is gone to the late Mass."

"Come and see a bit of coursing then," Mark said.

Maurteen Conneely twirled the strap impatiently, and looked at Mark with some disapproval. Martha regarded the young giant quizzically for a moment.

"Maurteen does not like the idea at all," she said. "He thinks it is not the thing for a woman to step it out across the country with a pair of poachers."

"You won't be able to get over the walls," Maurteen said, blushing.

"Won't I? Well, I'll just let you see," Martha said. "Hello, Dominick!" she cried, as a figure crossed the field below them. Dominick came up in a certain slinging trot.

"He's like an old dog tired of the chase," Maurteen Conneely said.

Martha closed out the door, turned the key in the lock, and then put the key under the door.

"Dominick," she said, "I'm going for a bit of a course. Keep an eye around the place until I get back."

"Yes, 'm," Dominick said.

"Now, boys," Martha said, "step it out."

"Are you not going to put on a shawl or a hat or anything?" Maurteen Conneely asked incredulously.

"Not a scrap," Martha replied. "Just take me as I stand, or leave me. Besides, I want to scandalise you, Maurteen. You belong to the kind of men folk that would cover up the faces of women in a thick veil, like they do in the East. Now, I'm as well entitled to show my face as you are, you long-legged Oriental. It will do people as much good to see it as it will to see yours.

Besides, I'm as well entitled to get the wind or rain in my face as you are. It's the same price for us all. Step out there, now."

Mark laughed as they went down the fields. Maurteen Conneely kept a little way ahead, striding on his supple limbs impatiently. Dominick looked after them for a little, then said, "Be damn to it, but them town ones do be very forward."

"I had a letter from Brendan Nilan yesterday," Mark said, as they walked along.

"Had you, indeed? Where from?"

"Copenhagen."

"What's he doing there?"

"He says he's——"

"Studying? What do they know more about crubeens than we do? I think he is a humbug."

"No. Whatever else Brendan may be, he's not a humbug."

"Then he's what the song calls an 'arrant rover.'"

"He may be that. Anyhow he's finished with the Danes and the Belgians. He'll be back by the end of next week."

"To Clonlea?"

"Yes."

Martha grew a little thoughtful. "Between ourselves, Mark," she said, "what brings him to Clonlea?"

"Well, for one thing, I kept at him to come. Besides, he intends to settle down in Ireland, and, if possible, in Clonlea. He took to it greatly."

"But what's he going to do?"

"To farm."

"He can't without land."

"He wants to see if he can buy a farm. He has come in for money-shares or something. I'm looking forward to his coming. He'll be of help to me in fighting for the people in Talamh-na-ocras."

"Oh, the people in that country place, the congests?"

"Yes."

"Luke says you are wasting your time, Mark, trying to get them out of that place to better land."

"I know, I know."

"He says he does not see why there should be such striving for people who were never known to have anything. They're no worse now than ever they were."

"I know, I know."

Martha turned to Mark, conscious that there was a hardness in his tones.

"What are you biting your lips for?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Suddenly Maurteen Conneely's voice rang out like a trumpet blast: "Hull-a, hulla, hulla-hulla," it went. Immediately the two hounds were loosed and shot out straight ahead. Mark and Maurteen went after them at top speed. Martha saw a brown animal rise to a grey stone wall and clear it buoyantly. Soon after the two hounds cleared it.

"Oh, heavens," she cried, as Maurteen Conneely took it with a clear spring. Mark negotiated with less elasticity. He placed his hand on a top stone and vaulted over. Martha looked around a little helplessly. She had an idea that all people had to do at a course was to sit down on the grass and watch the hounds going. Now it appeared people had to do the going as well. Just then her eye caught a sheep gap in the wall. She made for

it, and got through on all fours, conscious that she was anything but dignified, and painfully aware that the ground was beaten soft, and smelt vilely. When she stood up in the next field it was empty. She fancied she heard voices some way down to the left, and went in that direction in a series of breathless little runs, the wind pleasantly in her face, her eyes shining, her teeth showing. A stile in another wall led her into a larger field, dotted over with clumps of whins, on which a shower of golden blooms were showing. She walked through them leisurely, lost in admiration, touching the prickly brambles with her fingers, her steps becoming more wandering. Once or twice she stood, shading her eyes to catch a glimmer of the sea, the white foam visible on the swells. She began to forget about the chase, and to hum to herself in a low voice. Her steps brought her on higher ground. A winding white road in the valley, the road to the sea, to Cuangorm, showed below her. An aggressive house, with a thatched roof and yellow-washed walls, stood out on the road. Her eyes remained riveted upon it for a while, observing the cars heaved up along by it, and the movement of the black figures of some men about it. "It is the one thing I hate in the place," she said to herself, her eyes to the house. "I would like to blow it into the sea, Lynch's public-house—'Loftus Lynch' over the door, the letters crooked and lopsided, looking as if they were drunk. . . . I wonder does Mark or any of them suspect. . . . I think not. . . . Oh, it's a passing fit; it won't amount to anything." She hummed again, resuming her tramp through the whins. The quick patter of feet sounding on the ground arrested her attention, and she ran out

from the whins to the clear ground. Coming straight and gamely down the hill, a star of white in the brissen fur showing below the throat, the long ears lying flat along her back, a hare was fleeing. Behind her stretched the two hounds, two grim dark forms closing upon her slowly, steadily, inevitably. Martha stood fascinated, a sudden emotion sweeping her that the contest was unfair, savage—two great animals laid out against one beautiful animal. She remembered the name the people in Clonlea gave the hare in Irish, "Doirin," or little dear. She was beautiful enough for that name. The animal swept by her, then the hounds panting, one red tongue showing a little from the long, narrow, terrible mouth; the teeth were glowing for the snap. They were drawing in upon the flying brown fur. Suddenly the hare "turned" and spun round on her long hind legs on the sheer fall of the sharp hill, and, without losing speed, faced up the pull of the slope again. The hounds, silent except for their panting, went flying down the slope, unable to check their own velocity. Martha was amazed at the ground the hare gained by the device. She stared at the sinewy body as it cut up the hill, and it appeared to her that it lengthened out as it went, like the bellows of a concertina that is drawn outwards. As it passed she was horrified to see the eyes roll backwards in the head of the hare, terror in their unnatural brilliance. Then the animal had swerved in through some clumps of furze and got lost to sight. The hounds came soon after grimly back to their work, more of the red tongue showing, some white flakes of froth scattered along the dark body. She listened to the feet pattering through the whins for some time; once or twice there

was a tear through the brambles, and then the sound gradually died down. Further up she saw the figure of Maurteen Conneely for a moment against the sky as he stood on a wall swinging one of his long arms. Martha went leisurely up the hill. Some voices hallooing in that direction directed her course. She came upon Mark and Maurteen unexpectedly. They were stretched on the grass, the hounds beside them, their long tongues out panting in quiet gasps that sounded like a tattoo.

"Where is the hare?" Martha asked.

"Got away. Blinked them in the furze."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

"She must have come down from Slieve Ban. She is a real mountain rover."

"Your hair is all blown down," Maurteen Conneely said.

"No fear of it blowing away, Maurteen. It's not a wig."

Mark stretched out his hand and ran a strand of the hair through his fingers. Martha drew back a little, her eyes on the clear-cut, eager face, the sinewy, well-shaped body. She bound up her hair demurely.

"We are going on West now," Maurteen said.

"Which is a polite way of saying that I had better run away home," Martha rejoined. "Well, I won't."

"Please yourself," Maurteen said, shortly.

"If you pay any more compliments, Maurteen, I'll take off my boots and tramp the rest of the way barefooted."

"Bare feet are no great wonder in Clonlea," Maurteen said.

"Come on, Martha," Mark said, rising—"we might rise another hare."

They resumed their journey. Martha walked well, tramping across the fields, scrambling over stone walls and ditches to the best of her ability.

"She's a rare tom-boy," Mark told himself. They came to a place where, beneath them, the soil gave way to that spongy turf that tells of the approach of the coast line.

"Let us get near to the sea," Martha said.

"There is not much hope of another hare," Mark admitted. "We'll go as far as Cuangorm."

Cuangorm was a sort of miniature harbour, rough and wild, with great boulders hemming it in. There was an apology for a strand, and a primitive wooden landing stage, out from which small craft were moored—yawls that were broad and flat and mostly used for carrying turf "pookens" that were used for fishing, and skiffs built of simple frame covered over with tarred canvas. An old woman in a red petticoat, a little grey shawl about her shoulders, tied in a knot at the waist, and a red handkerchief about her head like a hood, was coming from the landing stage. Mark went up to her at once and shook hands. There followed a talk in Irish between them. The old woman gesticulated with energy, and what appeared to Martha a flood of eloquence broke from her. Mark indicated Martha laughingly, and she heard the name of Luke mixed up in the torrent of language. The old woman came to her and shook hands with warmth. She went on talking in Irish. Martha had an impression from the mouth of the woman, which was large, the lips thick, protruding and distinctly lined in

the centre—that she was good-natured, and from her eyes—light in colour, sharp, merry—that she was shrewd. Martha guessed she was praising Luke, and she knew that it would come easy to the woman to praise anybody. She had the essentially Western characteristic of praising shamelessly without meaning a word of it.

"Seumas b'low b'last in fron," the old woman said, as if winding up an oration. She looked with her keen eyes on Martha and saw she did not understand. She threw up her hands with an air of depreciation, saying, "Och, ta beurla briste agam, go wora Dia orrainn!"

"What is she saying?" Martha asked, in a stage whisper.

"She means to say, 'Seumas is below, beyond in fron,'" Mark replied. "She also explains in Irish, 'I have broken English, God help us.'"

"Who is Seumas?" Martha asked.

"The man. He often takes us for a sail."

Mark turned to the old woman again. They spoke rapidly in Irish. Mark was apparently arguing with her.

"Will you come for a sail in a turf boat?" Mark asked, turning suddenly to Martha.

"Oh, Mark! It would be heavenly! I'd go out in a cockleshell this moment if I could fit in it."

"Very well, she'll let us have the sail."

"What about the dogs?" Maurteen Conneely asked, hostility in his tone.

"Oh, the dogs will be all right. It won't do them any harm," Mark replied.

"I won't bring them into any boat," Maurteen said.

"Maybe, the bitch to jump out of my hands into the bay."

Mark turned away with the old woman, and they made their way to a little cottage some distance from the shore. The ground before it was sodden, some flat slabs of stone reaching up to the door like stepping-stones across a river. A boy of fifteen or so was standing shyly at the door, his thumb in his mouth. He wore a red "over-all" reaching to his knees, certain angular contours of his figure and his close-cropped head alone proclaiming his sex. Martha recognised the type. She had often seen boys like him, dressed as if they were still "little" girls brought into Ballyrea to get shod for the first time. They afforded certain amusement to the citizens in their initial attempts to stand upright in boots on the smooth flagged pathway, their movements as cautious and the result often as disastrous as a man on skates for the first time.

"You are not a bit nice to me," Martha said to Maurteen while they waited.

Maurteen shifted uneasily on his feet, the ever-ready blush mounting his cheeks.

"In fact," Martha went on, "if you don't show some sign of improvement I shall feel bound to kiss you in the most public way."

Maurteen laughed. He had a peculiar sense of humour. "What about Luke at all?" he asked.

"Why, of course, Luke will then feel under an obligation to give you an awful bashing," Martha replied. "When people can't behave they must take the consequence."

Mark, the old woman, and the little boy in the red

shirt, came down from the cottage carrying the sail and the rudder, the old woman more voluble than ever. They all stood on the wooden landing-stage while Mark made the preparations, setting up the sail and fixing the rudder in the stern.

"I won't go," Maurteen Conneely said, stubbornly.

"If you don't," Mark replied, "you can do the other thing."

Martha stepped lightly into the boat, and Mark hoisted up the mainsail on the pulleys. They were soon gliding out from the shore, the old woman's voice, raised almost to a shriek, followed them. There was a pleasant breeze, the old boat listed a little, and then she stood out for Galway Bay.

Martha was delighted, she enjoyed the swell, the motion, the liberty of the scene, the sense of travelling over the great depths beneath, her eyes now upon the procession of jelly fish that drifted by, again on the Clare hills standing stark against the sky. Mark gave her the names of the places as they came into view. When they had made some leeway the old City of the Tribes became visible in the distance, the houses a vague heaped up pile. The sails of some stray boats were dotting the bay, a long thin streak of smoke far out showing the track of a steamer. Something so faint, that it looked like a low cloud on the horizon, represented the Islands of Arran. Once or twice Mark asked if they should put about for Cuangorm, but Martha said, impatiently, "No, no. This is what I wanted."

"All right, then. Look out for your head," and they made another tack when the sail had swung over.

Martha crawled up to the bow of the boat, hanging

out over it, her chin in her hands, her eyes taking in all the strange beauty that they saw on land and sea, her breath pleasant in the salt air, her cheeks wet from stray jets of spray, her senses becoming more and more drugged by her mood. Mark sat at the stern, leaning back, his eyes half closed, his attention divided by his pipe and the tiller. Suddenly Martha drew back to a seat and sat bolt upright on it, regarding Mark for some time.

"Mark," she said at last, "do you think it is hard to die by drowning?"

Mark smiled. "How could I tell?" he asked.

"They say it is a grand death," she persisted.

"I don't believe it," Mark said, "I saw a young fisherman once who was taken dead out of the water in Cuangorm. His bauneen was hanging in tatters about him, the seaweed was wound like a rope round his neck, and his face was contorted. He had made a terrible battle."

Martha shuddered. Then she said, "But, of course, he did not want to die. They say one hears beautiful music when drowning."

"I don't care for music, drowning or no drowning," Mark said, his eyes on the pensive figure before him, the hands joined in the lap, the eyes shining under the half-drooped lids.

"It is growing very calm, is it not?" Martha said after a pause.

Mark sat up with a sudden jerk, wakening from his own mood. One of those swift stillnesses that settle down on the sea had set in unnoticed.

"I'll put about," he said. "Duck your head."

The boat stood for Cuangorm. She listed less. The swells about her grew more attenuated, then gave way to what were only ripples. The sail flapped empty, making a noise about the mast. The wind no longer filled it out. The breeze had died down.

"Mark," Martha said, "have you any biscuits or anything a savage could eat in your pocket?"

"By heaven!" Mark cried, feeling his pockets. "I have. I have bread and butter. We generally bring it when out for the day's coursing."

"Divide it."

They ate the bread and butter ravenously. The boat began to rock a little, then settle down more or less. The sail hung limply.

"Martha," Mark said, "we're becalmed."

"What is that?"

"No wind to make us go."

"Is it dangerous?"

"No, but disagreeable."

"I don't mind," Martha said. "Everything is changing. Look at the Clare hills. They were stark against the sky, grey and brown a while ago. Now they are half hidden, a dim purple."

The day rapidly failed. The water became dark and polished about them. The shore lost its distinctive landmarks. The air grew cold.

"You had better take my coat," Mark said.

"No, I am all right. I don't care."

Mark laughed softly. To himself he said, "Anyhow she's no whining cat. She's good stuff, better than I thought."

"Will we get in before night?" Martha asked.

"I don't know," Mark answered.

"Are we going at all?"

"Just a little. A sort of drift. The tide is with us now. We have that much luck."

"Why did you not bring oars?"

"That is what I have been thinking myself. Maura Lally had so much talk that I forgot them. She and Seumas will be debating and contending about our plight in the boat."

They had drifted to boulders at the entrance to Cuangorm—long spells of silence giving way to little commonplace answers and questions.

The hills rose dimly about them, making the water in the shadows more black. A clear blue night sky overhead made patches of the water reflect in colour. The drift of the tide heaved up white patches of foam in long thin streaks. Now and again phosphorous gleamed on the water.

"I have seen visions all the way home," Martha said.

"What sort of visions?"

"Oh, fairylands. Strange, beautiful places with strange people and shapes moving about them. Vapours and clouds and colours and everything exquisite, things that I used to dream about when I was little."

"You're something like Brendan."

"What Brendan?"

"Brendan Nilan."

"Oh, I had forgotten. What is that?"

Something had whistled in the sail. The air seemed to shiver about them. Little curling movements went over the surface of the water. Creases were wiped out

of the folds of the sail. The boat heaved up to a ground swell.

"Thank God," Mark said. "The wind again."

They moved in with some rapidity, Mark's whole attention given to the steering.

"Look at the light," he said. "It is coming from Seumas Lally's cabin. He knows I want a landmark to go by. There are some ugly rocks about, but they are as known to me, even in the dim light, as the seven deadly sins. Oh, there is Maura's voice."

The voice of the old woman, high strung, almost falsetto, came out over the water, an odd note from her man sounding like an accompaniment. They drew up to the landing stage. The old man came on board to reef the sail and moor the craft, Mark and Martha stepping across.

"What about a cup of tea?" Mark said. "Maura says she has it for us, and a hot cake."

"Splendid," Martha cried.

They sat in the little cabin, a deal table pulled to the fire. The tea was boiled and black, but they drank with delight, demolishing a soda cake beautifully made and baked. The old woman never ceased talking. The little boy, her grandson, whom she was rearing, sat in the chimney corner, his eyes steadily on Martha. Fishing nets draped the walls, and some rows of herrings and gurnets were hanging from the ceiling over the fire, going through a process of home curing. On a rafter over the back door a flock of hens were roosting, stirring now and again, a great black and grey cock in the centre. Little puffs of turf smoke wreathed about the place. When they stood up to go, the old woman

put a grey shawl about Martha's shoulders, talking all the time. Martha protested, but the old woman persisted. Old Seumas came in and put his back to the fire, a wiry little man with a hard drawn face. They were standing near the door when a pair of wings flapped a little on the rafter and then the clarion notes of a cock crowing filled the cabin.

Martha noticed that it had a profound effect on the people. Old Maura ceased talking, then looked up at the ceiling with terror in her face. Seumas moved over to the window, his hands running down restlessly over the hems of his bauneen. The little boy, with a little whine, sprang from the chimney corner and vanished into the next room. Old Maura began to beat her hands, moving about the cabin, and Martha guessed that the low words she spoke were muttered prayers. Mark said some words in quick sympathy, and then they left the cabin.

"What happened?" Martha asked, as they walked up a boreen that led to the main road to Clonlea.

"Did you not hear the cock crowing?" Mark asked.

"I did, of course. But what was strange about that? I expect he often crowed before."

"Not before midnight on the roost," Mark said. "It is a sure sign of ill-luck, of misfortune."

"Surely you do not believe that, Mark?"

She turned to him quickly, and saw that his face was set, his eyes steadily ahead, his expression troubled.

"I have been brought up to believe it," he said. "I would sooner not have heard the crow, but I suppose I am not as much terrified as the Lallys. Maura will

wring the neck of that cock the first thing in the morning."

"Then the cock has my pity and everybody else my——"

Martha paused.

"Your what?" Mark insisted.

"I was going to say my contempt, but I won't."

Mark laughed. What a naïve dissembler she was!

"I don't see how one who has been seeing visions and fairies all the evening can afford to laugh at others," he said.

They had come to the end of the boreen. A little wall cut it off from the road. There was a break in it that served as a stile. Mark went out first and gave Martha a helping hand over. She stumbled a little, and to save her he caught her in one of his arms.

"My goodness, you are as light as a feather," he said, and playfully swung her about in his powerful arms, as one might swing a child. When he allowed her to stand on the ground again she stumbled a little. Mark laughed.

"You're drunk," he said.

Martha pulled the shawl up on her shoulders, collected herself, and looked at Mark. Something in her gaze made him pause. She walked up close to him, looking directly into his face.

"I'm not angry, Mark," she said, in a voice that sounded distinctive and decisive, "but please don't do that again."

Mark was conscious that Martha was hurt, but that she was perfectly self-possessed. He grew a trifle uneasy.

"But what harm is a little trick like that?" he asked.

"None whatever," Martha said. "All I say is, don't do it again."

They walked home together under a sky that was alive with stars. The conversation was as free and pleasant as before, but Mark felt the sense of this unexpected dignity, what he thought, indeed, hoity-toitiness on the part of Martha. He stole little looks at her long delicately moulded face, some sharpness about the nostrils that betrayed, he thought, some breeding, the white gleam of the large forehead some pride, something that put her above the women he was accustomed to meet. He was dimly conscious of a little pang beginning to stir somewhere in his own being.

On the road home they passed Lynch's publichouse, the yellow walls of which stood out from the background of a dark hill. A light showed in the fanlight over the door. Some voices sounded in the shop inside, then a burst of laughter, the tribute, Mark knew, to one of a series of coarse jokes. Martha's ears involuntarily pricked up to distinguish if she could the voices, but she walked on in silence.

"Mark," she said, impulsively, as they neared the house. "I was a madcap to run away the whole day. What will Luke and your mother, the old dictator, say of me?"

"Oh, they won't bother," Mark said, lightly. "Except that Luke might be shouting for his dinner."

"Well, of course, it was the fault of the boat anyway," Martha said, a certain note of defiance in her tone.

She crossed the dull field by herself. There was no light in the house. She found the key under the door.

She lit the lamp in the kitchen and set about kindling the fire. She put on the kettle to boil, and then sat down.

"Luke has not been here at all to-day," she thought. "I feel dead beat."

She had finished a cup of tea when uncertain footsteps came up to the door. There was a little groping for the latch, then the door opened, and Luke came in. He kicked the door viciously, walked across to the fireplace, stumbled once or twice, his narrow eyes blinking in the light of the lamp. He glowered a little at Martha.

"Well?" he said at last.

"What is wrong, Luke?"

"Where were you all this day?" he said, hiccoughing, his gaze a little wandering.

"I was out for a walk and a sail in a boat at Cuangorm."

"Who with?"

"Mark, and, part of the time, Maurteen Conneely."

"What about my dinner? Am I to have no dinner?" He lurched a little on the hearth.

"I expected to be back."

"You expected. What good in expecting? Tell me what you——"

"Luke! Don't dare to speak to me that way. You have been drinking."

"Who is it drives me to drink? Tell me that, do." He made a movement to catch hold of the back of a chair and missed it, lurching over against the wall. He laughed idiotically, blinking at his wife.

"I'm a bit upset," he hiccoughed. "You drove me

to the drink. But look here, Martha." He paused, looking vacantly about him.

Martha crossed the kitchen, and went into the little hallway, locking the front door. She came back and cleared the tea things from the table.

"A neglected man, that's what I am," Luke said, beginning to whine.

"How many Sundays have I sat here waiting for you, and you never came home?" Martha asked. "I made no complaint. It was about time I took a day for myself."

"I come for me dinner to-day, and I had no dinner, no wife, no house. Nothing. I'm neglected, I tell you." He took a few uncertain steps towards Martha. She walked across the kitchen again. Luke made a vain movement of his hand to detain her.

"Martha!" he cried.

But Martha had gone up to her room. He stood at the bottom of the stairs, his head swaying about, his tongue slobbering over his lips. He heard the sharp click of a lock in a door upstairs. He groped his way back to the kitchen, making a wobbling motion for the fire. He grappled a chair and made as if to sit on it, but missing, came down on the ground. He got on his knees, grappled the chair, and rose to his feet again, looking about the kitchen. "I'm getting worse," he muttered, then laughed hoarsely. He fumbled in an inner pocket and took out a whiskey bottle.

"Martha!" he cried. "Gimme a glass. Have a swig of Lynch's rotten malt. Are you there, woman?" He made a move for the table, tripped on an unseen

stool, and came crashing down on the cement floor, his hand closing about the shattered bottle.

Martha came running down the stairs quickly. She saw the little pool of blood about his wrist. With a quick movement she wound an arm round him and propped him up on a chair. He was ghastly pale and muttered incoherently. Without a word, she got a basin of hot water and washed out the wound, binding it up skilfully with a handkerchief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REUNION AT MARTHA'S HOUSE.

"If I can't go into ecstasies about the architecture, Mark, I can say I like the limestone. It fits into the scheme of the landscape." Brendan Nilan was speaking of the new house on the hill in that direct, critical, cold fashion peculiar to him in some things that Mark found so strange. They were making their way up to Luke's place some evenings after the return of the rover. The new house on the hill was to the people of Clonlea a wonder; to the Cusacks a sentiment, an undreamt achievement, to Mrs. Mulvehill a reincarnation. The words about the architecture and the condescension as to the appearance of the limestone in its relation to the landscape spoken by the American sounded like drops of acid to Mark. He held his peace.

"Did the old woman make her ground good up?" Brendan asked.

"Oh, yes, we drove her up," Mark said. "But it is not her first visit."

"Wonderful woman for her years."

"People live long in these parts."

There was a welcome for the American in Luke's house. Martha met them in the little hallway, shaking hands. She showed them into a sittingroom on the right. Luke rose as they came in, his arm in a sling. He regarded his cousin with his near eyes, looking almost like one who was short-sighted.

"Sorry to hear of your accident, Luke," Brendan said. "How did it happen?"

"A glass to break in my hand."

"Ah, Maurteen, as large and full of life as ever," Brendan said, as Maurteen Conneely crossed the room.

"Bedad," Luke said, "you're no way changed after your travels. You're as thin and pale as ever, and the golden tooth as bright."

Mark went over to a corner and threw himself into a chair. Maurteen Conneely sat beside him and they started a conversation on the merits of greyhounds. Luke went to the fireplace, his eyes still on the American. Martha put her arm over the shoulder of a tall young girl and led her over to the new arrival.

"Why don't you speak to Sheela?" Martha said, laughingly.

"Sheela?" he asked, a little puzzled. The girl smiled at him and then he remembered. "Why, bless my soul, is this Sheela? Little Sheela grown into a woman in two years?"

"Welcome back to Clonlea," Sheela Conneely said, warmly, but a little shyly. Brendan Nilan was greatly astonished. He held her hand, looking into the girl's eyes. His memory of her centred round a certain pair of speckled, active, unashamed legs, certain eyes that always gave him the impression that they were native to wooded places, some wild hair that was mostly combed by the wind, a romping childish form, dancing into sight and dancing out of sight, a swaying thing in a holland frock that screamed about Clonlea. Now there was standing somewhat demurely before him a young girl whose figure already suggested her womanhood, wear-

ing a long skirt, a neat white blouse, a cameo brooch at the throat, her hair carefully made up, parted in the centre, puffed out about the ears, carrying with her an atmosphere of healthy freshness, freckles showed on the forehead and nose, and as she smiled Brendan distinctly remembered the upper teeth and their tendency to prominence. The first impulse to greet her as the child he remembered was checked. He bowed slightly to her instead, letting go her hand.

"Sheela is a big woman now," Maurteen said, a note of pride in his voice.

"And ever so much nicer than her brother," Martha said, laughingly.

The old woman came shuffling in the door, followed by Mrs. Cusack. Brendan Nilan knew there was a little family party in the new home in his honour.

"Well, son, hasn't Luke the fine snug place of it?" she asked, making her way to the fireplace, Martha pushing an armchair over for her.

"Very snug, indeed," Brendan said.

"I'll be giving you a hand with the tea things, Martha," Mrs. Cusack said. She and Martha went out to the kitchen. Sheela Conneely took a table cloth from a sideboard, spreading it on a table. Brendan Nilan's eyes followed her movements.

"What sort are them foreign people you risked your life with at all, pet?" the old woman asked.

"Very nice people," Brendan said.

"Are they black or what?"

"Oh, no, they're bleached, grandma, quite European."

"Well, anyway, they're foreigners. You can't deny

that," the old woman said, disappointed that he had not some horrors to relate, and determined to nail him to some terrible truth.

Brendan laughed. "Why, of course, they are foreigners when they leave their own country," he allowed.

"I don't like foreigners, niggers and the like," his grandmother said with decision. "I saw a black fellow once on the quays of Galway. He could look without blinking at the noon sun, and he had a mouth on him that was used to queer eating. He put the heart across in me."

"What way do they do things in Belgium?" Luke asked, scepticism in his tone.

"Very neatly," Brendan said, eyeing Luke.

"Have they a good way of living?" the old woman asked.

"And what way were you able to talk to them at all?" Maurteen Conneely struck in.

"In French."

"And can you talk French?"

"A little when I first arrived. I could talk the heads off them by the time I was through."

"Look at that!" exclaimed the old woman. "Faith, and it's Mary that has the right to be boasting out of you, she to give you so much knowledge and to keep you to the books growing up. It's a priest she should have made of you."

"I had no vocation," Brendan said, "I followed the blood, and I'm a peasant."

"A what?" the old woman asked.

"A peasant—we're all peasants, are we not?"

"Faith, I never knew that until you came across the ocean to tell us," the old woman said.

"He means a farmer," Mark said.

"We never call ourselves peasants. It was always The People. Take the wording of our ritual: 'The Land for the People.' 'The People's Rights.' 'Clear the Ranches of the Cattle; Make Room for the People.' 'No Power Can Bar a People's Will.' 'Kileen Welcomes the People's Champion.' 'Resolved: that we the People of Lisnashee in Public Meeting Assembled.' I once heard a man begin his speech: 'I have travelled far and wide over the broad acres of South Galway, and nowhere have I met a warmer reception than from the lion-hearted people of the historic parishes of Clonlea, Ballyhague, and Cuaneen and Gorm in mass meeting assembled.' If that man was as sure of heaven as that that would draw a cheer he could order his halo on the spot."

"So you never allowed you were peasants?" Brendan said, his tone pleasant, delighted to have Mark drawn into one of his rare half-humorous, half-satirical little speeches.

"Oh we did allow three parties to call us peasants," Mark replied, "but then they were among the greatest heroes of our national history."

"Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and John Mitchel?" Brendan guessed, as Mark paused.

"Not at all. They called us the people too. The national heroes that called us peasants were Daniel O'Connell, Oliver Goldsmith, and the British Government."

"What?"

"Yes, Daniel O'Connell said we were the noblest peasantry in the world, Goldsmith said 'A bold peasantry, their country's pride,' and the British Government made us into peasant proprietors. Our instinct was always aristocratic. We only allowed that we were peasants when we were noble, bold, or, better still, proprietors. It is only writers of books who have insisted upon our peasantry under all conditions. Your knowledge of us comes a good deal from books. Grandmother's knowledge of us never came from books. That is why we are peasants in your eyes and just people in grandmother's eyes."

"But the British Government a national hero of Ireland?"

"And so it is. Daniel O'Connell only called us the finest peasantry on earth because he wanted to rouse us. Goldsmith called us a bold peasantry, their country's pride, because he wanted to write a rustic poem. But the British Government believed both of them and made us peasant proprietors. Why, here we are to-night, grandmother a new peasant proprietor, the grabbed farm restored, a new house built on the hill. There should be a picture of the British Government over the mantelpiece, a share of shamrock draped around it."

"I'd see it to hell and damnation first," Luke, who had no sense of humour, broke out. "We're here because we have a right to be here and because we have fought the Government and beaten it."

"Did you do much of the fighting, Luke?" Maurteen Conneely asked.

"No, I didn't, Maurteen. But, if I did not, maybe some of my blood did it."

Brendan Nilan looked at Mark, whose eyes were half closed, a grim smile playing about his mouth.

"All the battles are not fought yet," Maurteen Conneely said. "You have time to make the Government smell hell yet, Luke, when you are so fiery."

"The people are settling down now," Luke replied.

"Devil a fear of them. From all accounts the next smoke will break out in Talav-na-ocras. They want to get out of the marshes and the bogs and the rocks to the rich land."

"Ah," Luke said, half grunting, "that's all humbug. What right has Patch Meleedy or Steve Dermody, or the like of Myles M'Donagh, that never knew nothing, to be upsetting the country?"

The laugh that went round the room left Luke puzzled as to its source. He changed the conversation, and, turning to Brendan, said, his long face wrinkling in a smile:

"I hear you are going to do wonders with the land. I believe the pigs are to get baths?"

"They ought to," Brendan replied.

"What's that you're saying?" the old woman cried.

"I say the pigs ought to have mud baths," Brendan said, some of the staccato note coming into his voice. The announcement was received with a roar of laughter round the room.

"Alelu!" the old woman cried. "Well, God give you sense, boy; but you'll make Clonlea split with the dint of laughing. Give baths to pigs! Well, if you do, they'll begin to fly, and then the old prophecy will come to pass. It will be the end of the world."

Martha and Mrs. Cusack, followed by the servant,

Mary Dempsey, came in, bearing the tea things. They all moved to the table, making way deferentially for the old woman as she limped to the head of it. She looked around the room and then spoke, her words Scriptural, her face so impressive that they all stood silent.

"This was the place of Mulvehills," she said. "It was here they saw a great life, great store, great want. They were people of strength, and people that God sent the favour of kindness and the burden of crosses. The men of them had arms for the plough, and the women of them had hands for the skill of the wheel. Let there be praise now that I lived to see this day, that I took shelter under the roof of this new house, and that before me I can see a daughter of my womb, and beside her the two sons of her womb, and the son of Mary who went from me. And with them the woman of Luke and the two children of a good neighbour to share our feast. Before bread is touched, let us give thanks to God."

She made the sign of the Cross, saying a prayer in Irish, her old figure swaying a little, the heads of the others bowed. They blessed themselves and sat down to the table. There was a certain solemnity about the repast. Once or twice Brendan Nilan found himself wondering if he detected a pensiveness in Martha, some little shadowing under the eyes. He noticed that her attention was given to Luke, a subdued anxiety to help him on account of his disabled arm. Luke was changed somewhat, too. He was not so peaky, so hungry of aspect. His cheeks suggested an inclination to puffiness. But he was even more alive to his own wants than ever, more inclined to expect others to come to his rescue. Brendan

Nilan's contempt for Luke, always smouldering, was more acute. Mark and Maurteen Conneely, at the end of the table, were wiring into what their healthy appetites would call "the grub" with a zest that was good to behold. Mrs. Cusack sat beside them, enjoying some rapid remarks of Mark's *sotto voce*. Sheela Conneely sat beside Brendan Nilan, alert and suppressed, very conscious that she was taking part in some solemn function that was not much in keeping with her natural spirits. Suddenly the old woman peered down the table, and asked, "Where is Mary Dempsey?"

"In the kitchen," Martha replied.

"Child of grace, she should be here. The Mulvehills had always her kind at their board."

Martha shrugged her shoulders slightly. She did not relish the idea of Mary at the table.

"She's making a kind of anniversary of this business," Martha said to herself. "I'd almost sooner have a wake." But she rose and brought in the shrinking and blushing Mary, wiping her hands in her apron apologetically.

"Mary," said Maurteen Conneely, "come down here. I'm lonesome."

There was a little laugh as Mary was being attended to.

Brendan Nilan was saying to himself, "Well, how darned conservative and yet how splendidly democratic grandma is! She's a wonder."

"Mrs. Mulvehill," Maurteen Conneely said, "Can I give Mary an odd dig in the ribs with my elbow? She's kicking me in the shins under the table."

"Oh, indeed, I'm not," Mary protested, but some-

how Maurteen Conneely had broken the spell of solemnity that threatened to freeze up the party.

"Ah, Maurteen," the old woman said, "you were always a prime rascal."

There was a spell of silence, and suddenly Luke broke into one of those laughs that sounded like a croak. They all stared at him.

"What's up with you, Luke?" his mother asked.

"Oh!" he said, "I was only thinking of the pig baths."

After tea they had some music. Martha went to the piano, Brendan Nilan and Maurteen Conneely attending on her. She turned over some music.

"I want to make the old party hop," she said in an undertone. "I'll play these for her." She showed a selection of Irish airs—melodies intermixed with jigs and reels, a medley calculated to play on certain surface sentiments, rapid transformation from the grave to the gay. Martha knew that these airs were played on fife and drum bands throughout the land agitation, that they were a sort of war airs, the instinct of the country musicians for the traditional style asserting itself in certain "turns" and peculiarities—in short, a compromise wherever it was possible between the modern scale and the liberty of the old strain style.

Martha rattled away. The old woman responded at once. She beat the floor with her stick to "humour" the lively airs. Mrs. Cusack sat down with her hands folded at the waist, stolidly gazing ahead, the expression on her face one of great solemnity, indeed of certain martyrdom. Mark smoked steadily. Luke regarded his wife at the piano with half-apologetic pride, now and

again bringing back his attention to his wounded member with deep and pitying concern. Maurteen Conneely brushed back his gleaming hair with the air of the supreme artiste waiting for his turn. Sheela, losing some of her silence, beat her heels and toes on the floor for the reels. Brendan Nilan had an impression from the music of a New York park when the band of the 69th Regiment turned out for an Irish occasion. A green atmosphere was created. Maurteen Conneely sang some of his traditional songs. Mark sighed heavily. The old woman sank back in her chair, subdued, inclined to ruminate. Brendan Nilan tilted his chair, the point of his fingers touching each other, something that nearly represented excitement in his expression, as moved as if he had drunk wine. There had to be some persuasion, winding up in almost threats, to get Sheela to sing. In the end she did. Brendan Nilan was a little amused to see her strike an attitude strangely reminiscent of Maurteen. "The Harp That Once" was her selection, with accompaniment by Martha. She got through it, nervous, exact, afraid of the piano, obviously singing as she had been taught to sing by labour and authority. It was one of those efforts that gives one the sense of school benches, the atmosphere of the blackboard, and the map, the smell of bread and butter benches, the breath of weighed air, the presence of a schoolmaster, whose personality is co-ordinate with the rostrum, whose soul lives in the birch. They applauded Sheela heartily. Brendan Nilan sat at the piano when they were all more or less getting tired of the music and asserting the right to free speech in aggressive whispers. Martha regarded him with lively interest. He crouched over the instru-

ment, holding his delicate, thin hands over the keyboard with claw-like energy. He played snatches of airs from operas, hesitantly, like one who had partly forgotten, whose technique had never been perfected, yet who had a grip of his instrument and a power of expressing his personality. Martha was amazed at the power of his hands. He began to breathe heavily through his nostrils, absorbed in his work. Once or twice the others stopped talking, looking up in surprise, as a passage crashed from the piano, the strings reverberating when he paused. He looked up laughingly again. As he looked up, Martha was moving away from the piano. As she turned away, he noticed that Mark snatched a cap from a seat beside the window in invitation to her to sit there. Martha went towards the chair, hesitated as if something occurred to her, made a little gesture of excuse, and moved over to the sideboard, moving things about it, then took a chair beside Mrs. Cusack. Afterwards Brendan Nilan remembered this little incident and the manner in which Mark smiled, showing his small, white teeth. At the moment he turned his attention to the piano, thought for a moment, and then played the Barcarolle from "Tales of Hoffman," getting a colour into the refrain that made Martha look a little pensive, her mind wandering from the talk around her. As he played he looked again at Mark, who was leaning back in the window aloof, as was usual with him, his eyes half-closed, his head swaying a little to the music. It struck Brendan Nilan as curious that it was the first time he had seen Mark Cusack respond to music of any kind. He stood up after a while and went over to him.

"I liked that thing you were playing now," Mark said.

"That is most curious, Mark."

"Why is it?"

"Well, I don't really know, you are the last man in the world I would expect to catch on to the Barcarolle. The fact that you dislike music makes it all the more curious."

"There was something in it that fetched me."

"Extraordinary, Mark Cusack to get fetched by the only neurotic thing I thumped. I can imagine you everything under the sun except neurotic."

"Give up your talk. Play it again."

Brendan laughed and went back to the piano. He played softly. Mark went on smoking, lounging back, his eyes half-closing again. Brendan was not conscious that Luke had come over to the piano, standing behind him. Brendan began to hum the Barcarolle as he played it. Suddenly the cranky voice of Luke spoke so close to him that he nearly rose up from the stool.

"About them pig baths," Luke said, and shook with the laughter.

Brendan Nilan took Luke by the lapel of the coat, smiling pleasantly, and drew him over to a seat at the window.

Luke found himself sitting down with an unwonted submissiveness.

"Mind my sore arm," he said. "I'm in dread it will fester."

Brendan ignored the dread. "If you were a swine, Luke," he said, "and well fed up, you'd feel devilish hot in your skin. You'd find that nothing loved you

half as well as lice. You'd spend most of your time rubbing them off against such edges as you could find. They would fairly torment you, keep down your condition. Your instinct on a hot summer day would be to get into some wet ditch and roll yourself over there. You'd cover up your skin with a damp cake. You'd be surprised how cool and pleasant the world would seem after that. You'd lie down and have a decent sleep after meals. You'd put in several nice rashers. Then you'd rub off the cake in the cool of the afternoon. Lice and their potential families would come off with it. You'd rest easier that night, dreaming of another roll in the ditch in the morning. The ditch may be dried up meantime. You could not do the thing satisfactorily. If you had a little place provided for you, with a proper blend of water and mud, you'd feel like an aristocrat. Your skin, provided you were a decent sort of breed, would be of the nicest pink complexion, proclaiming you a beauty to the eye of the swine-buyer. Now, don't you think we ought to give you a mud bath all to yourself, Luke, if we are to make a success of you as a porker?"

"How many dollars did it cost you to learn that wisdom?" Luke asked. "Is that what you were out foreign for? Why didn't you ask Dominick about it before you went? He'd spin it out of a penny book for you."

"Are the bonhavs feeding well?" Mark asked suddenly of Luke. Luke's face changed as he looked over at his brother.

"They're doing middling," he said.

"No more of them died?"

"No."

"Did any of them die on you, Luke?" Brendan asked.

"Half the litter," Mark remarked, smoking steadily. "They were lost when the sow was farrowing."

"I was not able to be about at the time," Luke said. "My arm was bad, and a fear on me that it would fester."

Again no sympathy was expressed.

"How's the new farm dairy since the purchase?" Brendan Nilan asked instead.

"Purchase can't do much for stubborn land, coarse in the soil, and with no sweetness in it," Luke said. His words Brendan thought were intended for Mark's ears.

"Purchase can do nothing for any land," Mark said. "It can give people a right to the land and nothing more. Land itself will only pay back according to what is put into it."

Luke regarded his brother with smouldering eyes. "Can you give me Dominick for to-morrow?" he asked. "I will draw a load of seaweed from Cuangorm, I'm not much use disabled. Seumas Lally sent word to say he had the weed manure."

"It's hardly the time for drawing it," Mark said. Then, after a pause, "but it might be as well to have it. You can take Dominick."

Mrs. Mulvehill rose to go. She had suddenly, in the midst of a disquisition on family history, seized her stick and risen, anxious to get back to the old house. The party broke up. As Mark and Brendan walked home,

Brendan asked, "Has Luke been running the new farm well?"

"No," Mark said, "he has not. He is neglectful, and no neglectful man can manage a farm. He is ugly tempered when he goes to sell at a fair, and that does not do. When he buys he has no patience. I never knew how helpless he was until he set up for himself. He did not know how to break in a young colt he got the May after he took over the farm. It maddened me to see the way he was ringing her up, and to save the mouth of the animal I took her in hands myself."

"I expect Martha——" Brendan began.

"What can she do?" Mark cried. "What does she know about rearing calves, or feeding pigs, or making butter? My God, she did not know how to feed the hens or cut the seed potatoes for the drills."

"Of course, that was to be expected."

"She had to depend on the girl, Mary Dempsey, to do everything that a farmer's wife should do. We know what dependence on another means."

"I guess they'll rub along all right just the same. These sort of people have an extraordinary gift of holding on and surviving the fit. . . . Hello, what's that?"

A young voice was singing somewhere down the road. It broke with extraordinary freshness and in that traditional note that so enraptured Brendan Nilan. He listened with his lips parted. The intonation was perfect of its kind.

"That's Sheela Conneely," Mark said. "She's singing one of Maurteen's songs."

"But, my God, why did she not sing that for us to-night?" Brendan Nilan asked, with some excitement.

"I suppose she thought it would not be polite in high society," Mark said. "She'd be ashamed."

"Ashamed! Look here, Mark, do you think I shall ever understand Ireland?"

"Could not say," Mark replied.

They walked up the road together, turning in at the little gate to the front of the house. As they had gone through, something swished through the air and caught Mark on the head. He turned round sharply.

"All right, Miss Sheela," he said. "That's nice treatment to give your hat. I'll pay you off to-morrow."

The hat shot in again, a yellow rose suspended from the long blue ribbons. Mark made an effort to catch it, and missed. A peal of mocking laughter greeted his failure. Brendan Nilan pressed the latch of the gate quickly, swung it open and stepped out on the road. Some yards ahead a vague figure was moving down by the hedge. He gave chase. Sheela Conneely's laugh rang out as she fled before him. He gained enough ground to see her figure flying lightly over the road, the hat swinging behind her. Suddenly she made a side-sweep and landed up on a high ditch. He stood looking up at her, the slim outlines clear against the sky.

"Well?" she said.

"Come down," he commanded.

"Come up," she mocked.

He drew a long breath.

"You're short of the wind," she said.

He scrambled up on the ditch. When he had got up she was speeding across a little paddock. He gave chase again. There was some brushwood through which she passed, and then into a boreen. He tripped in the

brushwood and came down, rising with the feeling that a dozen thorns were stinging in his palms. He groped his way into the boreen. It was dim and silent.

"I say, Sheela," he called. There was no reply. "Sheela," he called, as he made his way to the road. It lay like a white gleam in the night. He got over an iron gate. Some movement in a field the other side made him start. He crossed the road. "Sheela," he said, softly, as he put his head over the stone wall. An old cow was looking up at him from the dim pasturage. "Rotten!" he said, under his breath, half angry, half amused.

Mark was hanging over the gate, smoking, when Brendan Nilan got back.

"Well, did you catch her?"

"No."

"I was thinking as much. She's like a wild thing."

"She has grown wonderfully."

"I never noticed it until the other evening."

"I'm going in," Brendan Nilan said, "I want to get some thorns out of my hand, and then we'll have a read, Mark, before turning in."

Mark settled himself over the gate again.

"Don't wait for me to-night," he said. "I'm not in humour for the books."

Brendan Nilan sat down alone, and after a little reflection, said: "I wonder what is wrong with Mark. He's changed."

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. LOFTUS LYNCH'S SHOP.

NEXT morning Luke Cusack and Dominick started off with the young horse to draw a load of seaweed from Cuangorm. They sat each side at the front of the car, their legs hanging down beside the shafts, Dominick driving. There was a thin mist of rain, vapours from the sea settling down over the country wiping out a great deal of the landscape. "Pull up," Luke said, when they reached Lynch's publichouse. He got down from the cart.

"I'm drenched," he said, "and the jogging on the car is no service to my arm. Come in and have a mineral."

They went into the publichouse, the head of the horse drawn up to the doorway, Dominick slipping the rein on his arm and going into the shop as far as this tether would allow him. Mr. Loftus Lynch made a little curtsey to him behind the counter as they entered. He was a spare, natty man, with sharp, quick eyes, sleeky hair, and drooping moustache, the dark hair well sprinkled with grey. He was a busy man, courteous, attentive, with nervous white hands that coiled ends of string about the fingers when not otherwise engaged. The outer part of the shop was a grocery; behind a rude partition further down was the more discreet bar. Rows of varnished little drawers with dark knobs occupied the shelves, and nearer the ground was stored away an

accumulation of various goods, all mixed up together. Mr. Loftus Lynch's white hands, all the same, could dive at a moment's notice into this collection of goods and land a named article on the counter for fair and open inspection. He could draw out any little drawer higher up blindfolded, certain of the stuff it contained. He was deft at parcelling, his attention given to the order at the moment, but with an eternal grasp of the general state of affairs proceeding in his establishment. When business boomed at both sides of the partition he could keep the two departments going merrily, dividing his energies with expert judgment. He could follow the funny story by the man sitting on the half-barrel with a half-measure in his hand, and outside the partition advise the women as to treatment of the ailments of the children, without giving one or the other any feeling of neglect or sympathy. Occasionally he raised the flap of the counter and stepped into the kitchen, overseeing the work of his private domestic affairs, checking any inclination on the part of the women folk to overdo the talking business, consulting with the people who had to do with his farm work, issuing his rapid orders, the execution of which they all knew would be inquired into later. When he delivered judgment he was decisive, unemotional, and from it there was no appeal. Mr. Lynch had a knowledge of humanity which was unerring. His advice was given sparingly, he was slow to blame, and praised with a caution that seemed to carry conviction. He was prepared to give from day to day the news of the outside world, a summary of the political situation, even an opinion and a criticism, while he parcelled up the necessaries of life or measured into a glass its

luxuries. He read the papers late at night and had them mastered for the following day. He had studied the genealogies, fortunes and scandals of the Royal Families of the world, and could clear up any point in regard to them which might cause the women in the locality worry of mind. He could clear or blast the character of any considerable prince while he made up a bottle to cure the cattle of murrain. All the great wars of history were as familiar to him as the latest reports from the herring fishing off the bay. You could no more pass off a bad penny upon him than you could hand down the moon from the sky. Mark Cusack was the only man in Clonlea who had ever got him to state definitely—and in confidence—his secret political conviction. It was, when delivered, to the effect that the Fenians were the greatest criminals that ever lived in the land, because they failed.

"Yes, sir," he had said, "if I had my wish I would see every one of them buried ten miles under Slieve Ban."

He had also shifted about the same night—the night the land was purchased—and in a nervous condition of mind confided to Mark Cusack that at bottom he was anti-clerical. But if he had revealed more of his mind he would also have confessed—which he did not—that he had set aside a sum of money to be expended when he died upon the erection of a stained-glass window to his memory in the Clonlea Parish Church. It may also be added that he regretted ever since having confided in Mark Cusack, and that from that moment a smouldering hostility sprang up against him which was, needless to say, held in excellent check. Brendan Nilan he disliked from

the very start, though he never said so. The American took too lofty a tone, had stepped into his shop once and never changed a sixpence there, but, on the contrary, had been inclined to approach Mr. Loftus Lynch with a quick manner and a slow light in the corner of his sombre eyes that took in too many details. Mr. Lynch liked simplicity, sympathy, the human frailties, and he found them greatly lacking in the American. He had even suspected the visitor of making secret fun of the verses which had been composed by the local schoolmaster in lieu of an irrecoverable debt, and printed at great cost upon the tea bags. The manner in which Pinch and Clinch had been worked into rhyme with the triumphant concluding Lynch had often struck the owner of the establishment as one of the finest things in literature, certainly good value for a debt which was perfectly hopeless.

When, then, Mr. Loftus Lynch, his figure thrown against the background of the varnished drawers, stooped his head to peer through the window between two biscuit tins, and saw Luke Cusack pull up outside his door, he was pleased. When he had made his curtsey, he leaned his elbows on the counter, his white hands joined, and fixing his eyes on the bandaged arm, made close and sympathetic inquiries as to the accident, the amount of pain it had caused, the treatment it had received, and finally a request that he might view the wound. After this had been done, he bandaged it up very deftly again.

"Now, I have an ointment here, Luke, which is the very thing for that."

He dived into the lower shelves and drew out a

coloured card with little boxes attached. He took one off and presented it. Luke put it in his pocket.

"Give Dominick a bottle of minerals."

"Ginger beer," Dominick said, promptly, his mouth twitching, his eyes full of the fizz to come. The glass was handed to him, and he dived into it, drawing a long breath when he had finished. Then he wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and looked about the shop as if he had caught some glimmer of what heaven might prove to be if he were let in. We are all creatures of our prejudices.

"Now, Dominick," Luke said, "you'll be going on to Cuangorm with the car. If I don't overtake you, you'll turn round and help Seumas Lally to load the weed. Mind the colt, for she might be restless. And make no delay on the way back. Mr. Lynch will have another bottle of ginger beer waiting for you."

Dominick jumped nimbly on to the cart and drove away, his face beaming in the rain. Luke walked down the shop below the partition and settled himself on an upturned barrel, his back to the partition and the world outside. He sprang into this seat with the air of one who was used to it, who had been denied the pleasure of it for some time. Mr. Loftus Lynch paced with him into the bar with sympathetic strides.

"I hear your cousin has come back again," he said as he put the glass to the silver tap without waiting for the order.

"He has," Luke said, adding the water with judgment.

"Well, well, I suppose he'll want to be making changes now, to show Clonlea how to do it."

Luke held the glass before him, on a dead level with his lips.

"Do you know what?"

"What?"

"Baths he wants for the pigs." Luke shook with laughter. Then, as if the thing became too much for him, he drained off his glass, slapping it down empty on the counter. He settled himself into his seat, wiping the lips with the palm of his hand. Mr. Loftus Lynch raised his eyebrows, his eyes demurely on the counter.

"Baths for the pigs?" he asked at last.

"Yes, man."

"What does Mark say?"

"Nothing. Fill up that again." Luke spoke as if his brother's ridiculous attitude demanded another nip "to drown the memory of this impertinence." He buried his hands in his breeches pocket, and took out a half-crown, which he tendered. The point of a white finger drew it swiftly to the till, and the change, carefully counted, was passed over to Luke with an air that no such ridiculous transaction was really occurring between two good friends. At the same moment a man in bare feet, dressed in shabby clothes, a heavy stick in his hands, entered the bar.

"Good day, Murt Cooney," Mr. Loftus Lynch said.

"Good-morrow, Loftus," the new-comer said, then seeing Luke Cusack in the dim light, he beamed upon him, putting out his hand.

Murt Cooney was from Talam-na-ocras. He had there a hovel, a few acres of stones, the nose of a bog, and the two inevitable furze trees. He was somewhat of a rover, a handy man to drive cattle or sheep to a

fair, a good judge of a cow or a horse, an expert surgeon at a beast. He had a round, plump body, a fresh complexion, one of his eyes was turned, and in conversation he followed the realistic style. People had respect and sometimes a fear of his tongue. He leaned one of his arms over the counter, facing Luke Cusack, his figure dropping into the attitude like one who had grown into it from custom.

"What'll you have, Murt?" Luke asked.

"A foamer."

"It's a bit fresh to-day, Murt," Mr. Loftus Lynch said as he laid it before the new-comer.

"It is, Loftus." He took a pull and then regarded Luke.

"What way is the health, Luke?" he asked.

"Middling. No use in complaining."

"And the wife?"

"She is grand."

"I won't inquire after the children."

Luke fidgetted a little.

"It is given by all that no such figure of a woman ever walked the road of Clonlea as Mrs. Luke Cusack," Mr. Loftus Lynch said. "A most superior young lady."

"For myself," said Murt Cooney, "I'd like to have a few children round the house. That is just what I said to myself to-day and I walking by on the road. 'A house new built up on a hill,' says I, 'and it two storeys and slated, is a lonesome sight without a stir of young life.'"

He regarded Luke, as he spoke, with one eye, the other apparently on the raised eyebrows of Mr. Loftus Lynch. Luke drained his glass and pushed it across

the counter for replenishment. Then he turned to Murt Cooney.

"You're a great one to put thoughts for other people together going the road," he said. "I'd sooner have a warm house than a cold one with a houseful of children famishing in it."

Murt Cooney's fresh cheeks beamed like a polished rosy apple as he regarded Luke Cusack. The fact that he had a houseful of children in rags and not half fed, running like wild things about Talav-na-ocras, never occasioned him worry. There were so many that any adequate attempt to provide for them had been given up as hopeless long ago, leaving Murt Cooney a convinced optimist and philosopher. "God," he had often said, with cheerful approval of the edict, "God makes the back for the burden."

"I was thinking these days," he said to Luke, "that we might be better able to provide for ourselves now that the land is purchased."

"What has the purchase to do with you?" Luke asked.

"Mark says we will get a rich ranch or two broken up somewhere and have the land parcelled out among us. He was down with us last Sunday. He says we are too quiet."

Mr. Loftus Lynch beamed across the counter, unusually interested in the conversation.

"I was reading a pronouncement of a great man the other day," he said, "and what he says the country now wants is quiet."

"To be sure it is," Luke said with decision. "It took no great man to see that. A fool could see it."

"Well, I know a clever man that said another thing," Murt Cooney put in. "I heard it from his lips. He stood looking in at our village and the village beyond it. 'It's a rural slum,' says he, 'a blot on civilisation. The people would be right to stand up and rob and steal and devour all they could lay hands on, sooner than allow their children to starve on rocks.' That's what he said, and the people listening to him."

"Who was he, now?"

"Your own cousin, Luke, Brendan Nilan."

Luke gave a grunt of contempt. "Much he knows about it," he exclaimed. "If one of them gave him a belt in the golden tooth, maybe it would serve him."

"I don't hold with violence, Luke," Mr. Loftus Lynch said, "no matter how great may be the provocation. But tell me this, Murt. Has Mark his eye on any untenanted land for the people?"

"I believe he has."

"Where?"

"Twenty miles away."

Mr. Loftus Lynch pulled his drooping moustache. He was perturbed. "It's a wild cat scheme, and will never come to anything," he said, with decision. "The people won't have it."

"They will not," Luke said, "and why should they? Answer me that."

Nobody answered. Mr. Loftus Lynch was regarding Murt Cooney with concern. "Do you want to leave your native place, Murt?" he asked.

"I do not in troth," Murt replied. "I'm for me own people and me own place."

"Quite right, Murt."

"Look at the damage it would be to the country," Murt went on, his turned eye almost wound round Mr. Loftus Lynch's head. Where would Mr. Lynch be and his business, if the people are transferred twenty miles from his shop?"

Mr. Loftus Lynch drew back, leaning his figure against a barrel, his arms folded. "Murt," he said, "I was not thinking of myself at all. Nothing was farther from my thoughts. I'd be glad to see every man doing well for himself."

"To be sure you would," Murt Cooney agreed. "But I could not help thinking of the way your business would be slackened. It's often I thought it was a great sight to see the load of half barrels every week upon the road, drawing them out from Ballyrea."

"Let the people settle down now," Luke said, "it's time for them."

Mr. Loftus Lynch took some strides up and down inside the counter, his chin on his chest. Murt Cooney's steady eye followed him.

"The purchase was great for the country, and no mistake," he said.

"It ought to be great for the country," Mr. Loftus Lynch said, slowly, "but I tell you now that the farmers that bought out owe something to the country, too."

"They do," Luke said, uncertainly.

"The purchase put you up on the hill on the grab," Murt said to Luke. "Was not that another great sight for a man to lift his eyes to of a harvest day? It would comfort me to see a flock of children screeching about it if it was the favour of heaven to send them to that fine woman you got."

"Don't be harping on that, Cooney," Luke said, an ugly look coming into his eyes. Murt Cooney's cheeks shone, but he only shook his head.

"What does the country want now?" Mr. Loftus Lynch asked, stopping suddenly in his walk. "I'll tell you that, men. There are now before me, one a man that came under the purchase and the other that stands outside of it. If the people are shipped out of the place twenty miles, where are the farmers to get labour? Where are you to get labour, Luke? Who is there to save your hay, or your corn, or to turn in about your tillage at the sowing or weeding time? You're left high and dry. And if the farmers have no labour, what way will the people like Murt do? What the people in Talam-na-ocras want is labour, work, the chance of earning, and the farmers ought to give it to them."

"Now you're talking," Murt Cooney said, striking the counter with his fist. He had never heard Mr. Loftus Lynch deliver so long a speech before.

"The farmers have the land now," Mr. Loftus Lynch went on. "Let them break up more of it and give the people employment. I'm ploughing three acres extra myself in the autumn. I remember a time"—and Mr. Loftus Lynch went on to picture an idyllic tillage country, full of plenty, barns bursting, everybody well off, a great stir on the hillsides, boys and girls dancing at the cross roads. Murt Cooney's swivel eye expressed a sardonic delight. Luke Cusack moved on his barrel and said every now and again, "Them were the times."

"Let the people have sense," Mr. Loftus Lynch concluded. "Let them not be put off the track by wild schemes in Talam-na-ocras. When people go to them

again with fiery words, let the people turn round and say to them, 'Let the farmers give us employment, good wages. Let them break up the land that we gave our blood in helping them to win.' "

"By God, I'll say that to Mark Cusack the next time he comes near us," Murt Cooney swore. "I'll put the people on the right track."

"And, what's more," Luke broke in. "When I get my legs on the upland, I'll give the people labour." And he drained off his glass.

Mr. Loftus Lynch took the two measures and refilled them. "Now, gentlemen," he said, "this is my round." It was so rare a thing, that the two men outside the counter were rendered speechless. They drank in a grateful, a solemn, a holy silence. While they did so, Mr. Loftus Lynch raised the flap of the counter and stepped across to the kitchen, where his voice was heard interviewing the women-folk. Murt Cooney turned his crooked eyes on Luke Cusack after a little.

"The people will be looking to you now, Luke, and not to mark. He's too much above them, too fond of his own way. The people like a friendly man, one that is like themselves."

"To be sure they do," Luke said.

They sat in the bar for some hours, smoking and drinking, repeating their individual views. Mr. Loftus Lynch held somewhat aloof from them, only appearing when the service of his white hands was called for. The drizzle of the rain continued outside.

Mr. Loftus Lynch stood at his door for a few moments viewing the surroundings. He saw a figure looming out of the mist leading a horse by the head from

the direction of Cuangorm. The horse was limping. He recognised the unmistakable figure of Dominick.

"Luke," he said, stepping into the bar, "I see Dominick coming up the road with the colt and no cart. Something must have happened."

They stood outside the door until Dominick arrived. The young fellow looked frightened and round-eyed.

"What's on you?" Luke demanded.

"I was coming down Ballylacken Hill," Dominick said, "when all of a sudden one of the shafts broke. Some of the weed tumbled out on the colt; she thought to rear up and then fell. I took her out."

"Oh, my God," Luke said, "didn't I tell you to mind the colt. You're witness of it, Loftus, that I told him to mind the colt."

"I am," Mr. Loftus Lynch said.

Murt Cooney was feeling down the knees of the animal. She was restless and foaming. The knees were cut, a streak of blood flowing down one of them. "She hasn't broken her leg, has she, Murt?" Mr. Loftus Lynch asked.

"What!" Luke cried. "Don't say that, Murt Cooney."

"She has not," Murt Cooney replied, "but I'd say 'twas a near thing. She's badly lamed."

"Take her into the stable and wash her down," Luke said.

"I'd advise you not," Murt Cooney said, "she'll stiffen. Get her home now as soon as you can."

"Where's the load of weed?" Luke asked.

"On the road," Dominick replied. "The shaft is broken."

Luke suddenly made a dive at Dominick. The young fellow fell back from him, leaning on a sill of the window of Mr. Loftus Lynch's residence. He put a hand to guard his face. Luke broke it down at a blow and then struck the lad with his fist across the face, keeping at him until the others intervened.

"Shame, Luke, shame!" a woman said, who had come to the shop door.

"What luck could there be," Luke cried, his face purple, "with a bastard like him?"

Dominick was sobbing on the window sill. The woman went over to him, wiping his eye with a handkerchief.

"We'll have to get the cart out of the road," Mr. Loftus Lynch said. "I'll give you the mare, and you can go down and see to it. Maybe Murt would give you a hand."

"To be sure I will," Murt Cooney said. He was one of those idlers who shine so brilliantly in an emergency. "Send Dominick home with the horse."

Dominick set out, still sobbing, with the limping horse, while Luke and Murt Cooney took Mr. Loftus Lynch's mare to go in search of the cart of seaweed.

"I'll brain him," Luke was saying as they started. "He is nothing only a scald and a melt. A nice thing for me now to be put to these rounds and the hand I have."

While these things were happening on the road to Cuangorm, Mark Cusack and Brendan Nilan were walking in the rain over Luke's land, viewing the stock and seeing what was to be seen. They were in a field below the long slope of the hill beyond the house which was

called the winterage. It was a sheltered place, boasting some belts of trees and good hedges. Sheep were grazing in it. Brendan Nilan was passing a small group of them when something gave him pause. The animals looked up, their ears out in the inquisitive way they regard an intrusion. He walked slowly round one of these sheep, getting as close as he could, gave a low exclamation, and then called to Mark, who was some way ahead.

"What is it?" Mark asked. As he came the sheep bolted, stopped suddenly some distance away, their heads, in the way of sheep, cocked at the possibility of a lurking danger.

"If I'm not much mistaken," Brendan Nilan said, "one of those sheep has scab."

"Round them up," Mark said in his direct manner.

They moved down the field, closing the sheep into a corner. Suddenly one found a gap that was badly made up, bolted through it, and in another minute the entire flock was out into another field.

"Damn him," Mark cried, impatiently, "let him look after his sheep. Are you sure she showed scab?"

"Practically."

"Let's go and tell him."

They made their way back towards Luke's house. Martha came to the door as they approached. "A nice moist day," she said, banteringly, as they came up. "Very suitable for a country walk."

"Where is Luke?" Mark asked, his hands in his breeches pockets, his manner so gruff that Martha looked curiously at him.

"He went to Cuangorm," Martha said.

"Has he not come back yet?"

"No."

"Well, his sheep have scab."

"Oh, is that all. I thought you lost your purse, you looked so glum."

"It's a rather serious matter," Brendan Nilan put in.

Martha looked at the American and smiled. "What do you know about it, anyhow?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I know something of it," Brendan Nilan answered. He was conscious of some hidden nervousness, some smouldering fear, under Martha's airy manner. Mark put his little finger into his mouth and gave a shrill whistle. Martha stuck her fingers in her ears. The old dog, Shep, came galloping up from the other house, all business.

"Is there a sheep crook in the house?" Mark asked.

"I think there is," Martha said, uncertainly. She called to Mary Dempsey. After some search the crook was found.

Mark and Brendan Nilan made their way back to the winterage, followed by the dog.

"What is sheep scab, Mary?" Martha asked.

"A bad thing," Mary made answer; "the sheep would take it from one another, and if the police were to see them, they would summon Mr. Luke and put a great fine upon him."

"Oh, I wish he would come," Martha said, sighing. "I hate disagreeable things to be always happening."

Mark put the dog on the sheep, driving them from one field to another. He ran about with the sheep crook himself, imitating the weird bark of the dog so well that it was difficult to tell one from the other.

There was a great patter of feet and a rattling of heavy fleeces. The sheep were rounded up in a corner of a field where they could find no escape. There Mark went in among them, the dog keeping sentinel up and down on the outskirts, a very alert watcher, with a red tongue hanging out of his mouth. Mark had passed the crook to Brendan Nilan, who also stood back from the flock. Once a sheep broke away. Brendan Nilan made a drive at the animal with the crook, missed and cursed. Mark laughed. The dog brought back the sheep, but two others made good their escape. Mark took the crook, and the next sheep that made a dash for liberty he plunged the crook at her, the animal got pinned under the jamb, and was as helpless as a trussed fowl. They got the sheep back again. Mark went on with his examination. "There is a scab among them, right enough," he said, handling a sheep. Brendan Nilan could not help admiring the powerful arms as they lifted up the dead weight of the animal and put her over the wall. In all a dozen sheep were found suffering, some of them pretty badly, from scab. They were passed out over the wall to a little triangular piece of ground the other side, a little green patch that looked as if the other fields had forgotten to take it in—a lost thing on the face of the map.

"He must never come near them at all," Mark said. "Some of that scab is a couple of weeks old."

"It's likely to happen anyone," Brendan Nilan said.

"He'd let them rot in the fields, I believe," Mark persisted, any defence of neglect only rousing him.

They drove the little flock of affected sheep down a boreen that led to the road. From the road they drove

them into the yard beside Mark's house. They drew out of an outhouse a wooden structure known as the sheep trough, used for dipping the animals. They put it in the haggard, on the sheltered side of a haystack, from the rain. Then they got pails and drew water from the pump to fill the trough. While they were doing so, Martha, who had come down to hear if Luke had returned, arrived on the scene.

"Can I be of any earthly use?" she asked.

"I don't know that you can," Mark replied, his white teeth showing as he regarded her. She made an impatient gesture, and he leaned his arms on the side of the trough, looking at her.

"I could at least help to bring water to fill the thing," she said.

"But you'll get wet. Look at the drizzle of rain there is."

"I'm no more likely to be melted by it than others."

"Oh, very well, please yourself."

Brendan Nilan came from the pump bearing two pails of water. Martha regarded him curiously as he emptied them into the trough. Then she raised the empty pails and made for the pump.

"You take the other two," Mark said, "I'll get the powder."

When Martha arrived with the water, Mark was mixing the powder into the trough. "Easy now," he said, as she raised the pail. "Don't make a splash. This stuff is poisonous." He had taken off his bauneen, the shirt hanging loose and unbuttoned about his throat and chest. His sleeves were rolled up to the shoulders. She was conscious of his great strength, of the power of

the hand that swished up and down through the yellow liquid.

"Now, Brendan," he said, when his cousin came back with another supply of water; "we'd better get this job over. It's a sort of business that ought never be delayed."

They got one of the sheep from the little flock that the dog held guard over in a corner. Martha stood by as she saw the animal dipped into the trough, drawn up and down through it slowly, the head kept clear of the liquid. She noted the deft way Mark handled the sheep, managing her when the feet made spasmodic protests, the melancholy eyes looking out from the long, foolish face. Brendan Nilan stood beside him, quick to render assistance, holding the animal on the rack when Mark passed her up from the bath, the stuff draining off the wool through the rack. Then he swung the sheep to the ground, and she was allowed to walk through the gate to the yard, shaking herself like a dog that had come from the water. Martha was conscious that Brendan Nilan was not unaccustomed to the business, that he had some of Mark's directness, his quick method, and that Mark was aware of the fact, and pleased with the American. She was surprised that even beside Mark's physique his cousin showed some hardness, some grit that belied the white skin of the shoulders and neck, the comparative thinness of the arms.

"Are you aware you are standing in a thick mist?" Mark asked Martha suddenly.

"Everything seems wet to-day," she answered, "the air, the hills, the fields, the branches of the trees, the people, and the sheep."

Brendan Nilan looked up, some note in her voice attracting him. The stuff dripped down from the fleece of the prostrate sheep like a queer accompaniment to her words. "It does not make it easier to get things done," he said. "I often thought that people do not make sufficient allowance for the Irish climate."

"And particularly the Clonlea climate," Mark put in, laughing.

"Yes," Brendan Nilan said, soberly, "quite so. Those heavy mists are very wetting, and they are very prevalent in Western Ireland. The rainfall for Connacht——"

"Oh, heavens! the statistics—the diagrams again," Mark cried. "You have a craze for them since you went away. What's the good of telling Martha the comparative depths of the rainfall for the four provinces for a given time. She realises more when she feels her feet slopping in the ground."

"That is so, perhaps. I only wanted to say the people who carry about a certain weight of rain get fagged out more quickly than people doing the same sort of work in a dry atmosphere. It's like sending a soldier on foreign service with a heavy knapsack and expecting him to run with the native who goes naked over the sands."

Here the yard gate creaked on its hinges, and a sound of a horse being led in fell on their ears. Presently, Dominick, leading the lamed horse, came into the line of vision through the haggard gate. He paused when he saw the others.

"Why, what in the name of God has happened?" Mark called out as he held a sheep in the trough.

Dominick made no reply. The sheep was lifted, drained, and freed. Mark strode over to the gate. Martha and Brendan Nilan followed, hanging a little behind him.

"The colt is lamed," Mark said. "Why don't you bring her up to her own place, to Luke's?"

"I thought the pull of the hill—" Dominick began.

"What happened?" Mark's voice was hard.

"The shaft of the car broke. The colt was knocked. She came on her knees."

Mark went close to the colt, running his hand down her legs, her neck. "God, she is in a foam; the same as if you galloped her home. Did you gallop under the load?"

"No, Mr. Mark, I walked her easy."

"You walked her. What about Luke?"

Dominick's eyes wavered under the scrutiny of Mark's gaze.

"It was the shaft that broke," he said.

"Then you overloaded it with weed. It was fresh, wet, and heavy. Where is it?"

"At Ballylacken hill. Luke is seeing to it."

"The colt was put to a killing pull," Mark cried. Martha saw the passion of his face, as he moved about the animal, then stoop under her neck, feeling something there. The animal stretched her neck, and made a sound as if wind was pressing through a pipe. Martha heard Brendan Nilan make a low exclamation behind her.

"She's broken-winded, destroyed," Mark said, in a voice quiet with fresh anger. "I had damn good work breaking her in for him. Where is he?"

"He'll be coming soon," Dominick said, unsteadily.

"Who put up the load of weed?"

Dominick hesitated.

"Seumas Lally and myself," he said at last.

"Where was Luke?"

"His arm was troubling him."

"Where were his eyes, where were his senses?"

Dominick broke down. He began to sob. Mark looked curiously at him, then strode over, caught him by the shoulder, and spun him round on his legs. A side of Dominick's face that he had been holding steadily from the others was revealed. It was swollen, the eye was almost closed up, a blue-black colour was spreading over the flesh.

"Who did that?"

Dominick only sobbed.

"It was the blow of a fist," Mark cried, his passion overcoming him. "It was the blow of a damn bully, a coward, a whelp. By God Almighty, I'll——"

He had raised his powerful arm, wheeling round in his passion.

His eyes fell on Martha. She stood, slim and tall, her hands closed behind her back, her head raised, her chin and splendidly moulded features pointed, sharp. The eyes glowed under the half-closed lids. Yet both Brendan Nilan and Mark Cusack were conscious of a tragedy in the figure that was pathetic in its quiet, its dignity, the muteness of its protest, the inscrutability of its womanliness. The words died on Mark's lips and his arm dropped to his side. Brendan Nilan, observing this sudden transition in Mark, something that came over his face, muttered under his breath, "Gee!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SCYTHES.

As the harvest drew near, Brendan Nilan urged Mark to purchase a mowing machine. Agricultural machines had not arrived at Clonlea yet, for Clonlea was an out-of-the-way place, the mountains and the sea barring it in on two sides, the bog lands and the barren waste of Talam-na-ocras on the two others. All labour in the place was manual and primitive. There were some discussions and speculations between the cousins, but in the end Mark decided to purchase the mowing machine.

The evening of the day it arrived a group of young men came up to Cusack's house from Talam-na-ocras. They came to inquire if Mark had any news of the ranch of land that was promised to be broken up among them, and to which they were to migrate.

Brendan Nilan found them speaking to Mark on the road. Murt Cooney was among them. His chubby face was vivid in colour, remarkable in its frame of unkempt beard. He leaned on his stout stick. His crooked eye raked the company.

"We thought you might have word for us of the new land," one of the young men was saying.

"Nothing except what I have told you already," Mark replied. "Father Hugh Whelan is making the journey to Dublin next week. He will see the Estates Commissioners."

Murt Cooney went to Brendan Nilan. "These young

fellows," he said, "are going off to-morrow to the harvesting, some to England and more to Scotland. They wanted to hear about the land before they went."

"We're not sorry to be going," a young man said. He wore a loud scarlet muffler about his neck. His manner was aggressive. His face spoke of dissipation. He had been to the harvest fields of England several years.

"What is more," another declared, "I don't believe we will ever get land of our own."

"You will get the ranch broken up," Mark said, quietly.

The one who had been to the harvest fields in England spat out. "The curse o' God is on Ireland," he said, vehemently. "It is the scut of the earth."

"Daggons!" said the voice of a raw youngster, whose shirt hung open on his chest. There was a shout of a laugh. The group gave Brendan Nilan an impression of vulgarity, something that was uncouth, the children of rural slumlands. They had been congregating about the roads for some evenings, drifting about in little flocks, shouting and singing, impatient in their movements, restless as the swallows gathering for their migratory flight.

"The people want labour at home," Murt Cooney said. "They would be better off here than with land 20 miles away. It would be bad for the business of this place to see the little homes of the people in Talamna-ocras broken up. A scattering of the people is a woeful sight."

A young fellow in the crowd yawned. He had been fingering an inner pocket for some time. He drew from it the pieces of a flute and put them together. He got

up on the ditch and started to play. He beat the time with one of his feet, taking no notice of the discussion. The others went on talking. The notes of the flute made a strange accompaniment to the disputation.

"There was a strange squeaking sort of noise on the road early this morning," said Murt Cooney, eyeing Mark Cusack. Mark lit his pipe.

"I was troubled to know what it was," Murt Cooney went on. "I went down, sat on the wall, and I saw it passing. It was a mowing machine, and it was bound for Mark Cusack's."

"That's right, Murt, it was," Mark said, nodding.

"Machinery is coming in on top of us now," Murt said. "It will not be the men with the scythes that be giving their labour to the meadows."

"To hell with the labouring man!"a voice shouted, derisively, and the flute player broke into a shrill air.

"How do they cut the meadows in Lancashire, where you are going to-morrow?" Mark said, turning upon a speaker.

"We are not talking about Lancashire," Murt Cooney put in. "We are concerned with Clonlea. There was never but the one way of bringing down the grass here. And I can tell you one thing. The wheels of that yoke will never turn on the meadows on the grab. I have that from the mouth of your brother Luke."

Mark smoked on, his gaze tranquil as he took in the plump figure of Murt Cooney. But he knew that some trouble was brewing, and that it was brewing in Loftus Lynch's publichouse, and it would ill suit Loftus to have harvest ceremonies curtailed. Some of the young fellows were losing interest in the discussion. They

were turning to the flute player. A brace of them started a dance on the road, swinging each other about, jumping and cutting capers. Their brogues beat up a white cloud of dust about the place. One of them pushed Murt Cooney unceremoniously out of the way as he prepared to repeat his views on the labour question. Murt swung round on his heel, and gave the nearest one of the dancers a stroke of his stick across the back. There was a burst of laughter. The company was rough and ready.

The gate in the lodge leading to the home opened, and Martha stepped out on the road. Her tall, slim figure, the sense of freshness in the blue cotton dress, of housewifery in the check apron, the carefully made-up hair, and the air of distinction she carried about with her, had an immediate effect on the little gathering. The dancers gave up their extravagances. The flute-player ceased playing, lowering his head shyly. Hats were touched respectfully. Mark took the pipe from his mouth. Brendan Nilan showed his golden tooth. Martha smiled. She held a can in her hand.

"Which of you is Murt Cooney?" she asked.

"This is the gentleman," Mark said, pointing to Murt with the stem of his pipe. Murt's cheeks glowed.

"Mrs. Cusack sends this can of buttermilk for you to take home."

"Ah!" Murt Cooney said, taking the can, "Mrs. Cusack's heart is in the right place. God bless her and every good thing that she put out from her hand. That she may never know stint or shortness, only always great store, and that I may never die until I see yourself

in the house above with Luke and you rocking a cradle on his floor!"

Martha's lids drooped over her eyes, a little expression of pain crept into her face, she beat the dust with one of her toes.

"Martha," a young voice sang out over the hedge from the garden, "hurry up with the watering can."

"Yes, Sheela," Martha said, with some relief, and she disappeared.

"Come on home now, Cooney," one of the young fellows cried. "You're always getting prog. We'll play you home to the wife."

They fell into military order on the road. The flute player struck up a tune. Murt Cooney headed the procession, limping, his stick in one hand, the can of buttermilk in the other. Their voices rang out with the flute as they went down the road in a boisterous rendering of "As Johnny Goes Marching Home."

Mark and Brendan Nilan were left standing on the road together.

"What did he say about Luke and his meadows?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"He's to get them cut by the reapers in the old way. He won't avail of the machine." Mark knocked the heel of his pipe out on his fist.

"What reapers will he have?"

"The old ones always. The fathers and grandfathers of some of those boys."

"And they go to the harvest field of England?"

"They do. This is a wonderful country."

"Anyhow," said the American, "we're right out with the mower to-morrow."

"Yip!" said Mark.

The bushes were hung with great meshes of cobwebs as the little groups of men came from Talam-na-ocras. Now and again they were conscious that some of the great weaving done in the night got rent by their faces. The spiders that had put up all these wondrous fabrics were no longer to be seen, for they had retired with the break of day. Some of the men bore scythes on their shoulders, stones hanging from their belts about their waists, others held wooden rakes up against the sky, and they were making their way to the meadows. That indefinable scent of the Autumn was in the air.

Four of the people made their course for the meadows on Luke Cusack's land. They were old men, and Stephen Keetly was possibly the oldest. He had lost all his teeth. A weird white wisp of hair grew from his throat and along his neck to the ears. The chin was protruding, the expression of the face grim. He walked like one who was setting forth on an expedition that would make an epic. He did not contribute much to the conversation. Martin Dempsey was younger, but looked as if he had put in a harder life. His body was twisted, knarled as a tree that had survived many storms. His face was hard. James Kane stood erect, his complexion vivid under the grey hair. When he spoke his manner was energetic. He carried his scythe with a professional air. Festus Hynes had leanings to the earth; one hand was under his coat-tails, his face was to the ground, his bowed back lop-sided. He did most of the talking. He was a little old man with shrewd small eyes that had a certain cunning when they were raised from the sod.

"I mind the time," he was saying, "I was bringing a

young ass from Cuangorm and heard tell of the great struggle at the hay. At that time the two men had come up from the meadows by the river to the height on Mulvehill's land. It was there Kieran Darmody fell out on his face over the scythe. The man from Ballyhague stood up over the grass then, and he was like the cock that had given the other one the last spur."

"All the same I heard it from my own father that it was lanterns they had to hold up for them in the night."

"I tell you no, Martin," Festus Hynes went on. "I saw it with my own eyes. It was the moon they relied on. It was the second day of the struggle, and Kieran Darmody fell at one o'clock in the morning. It was the knees that gave way on him."

"Great men they were in them times, surely."

"Great powerful men, with terrible guts and wind that had lasting."

"How long is it ago, James?"

"Ah, it is two and fifty years since the contest. Two and fifty years, indeed! It is more, for the famine come after. You could see a draft of men on the roads in the evening and they throwing the bowls before them. Praise to God, I knew men to lift arms to throw the bowl, and the wind from the push was like a blast from the north."

"It was over a bowling match that the great contest in the meadows grew up between Kieran Darmody and the man from Ballyhague."

"No, Stephen, you're wrong, I tell you. It was as I said. They were comparing to each other all day Kieran Darmody was not going fast enough for the other.

'Let out your arm, man,' he'd say. 'Don't be making little strokes at the grass, like a gossoon that would have no reach in his arms.' 'Cut clean and clever,' the other would say. 'Take it from the root, and not having it gapped like the beard of a man's face that would be shaved when he was in drink!' From that it went on. Not one of them would give way. The people gathered about them then; and there was a weight of money put on in bets. They mowed the whole night, and through the next day, and when the moon rose again they were at it, following each other on the track of the grass, and nothing in them but two buckets of buttermilk. When Kieran Darmody fell he fell like a dead man. I remember seeing the blaze of heather for the champion over by Ballyhague, and when he went home there was not a man sober in the parish for three days."

The four old men crossed the fields that led to Luke Cusack's farm. Other little groups were scattering in other directions. There was an ease in their gait.

"It's ripe," one of the old men said when they found themselves in one of the waiting meadows.

"And a good sap in it," another said. They wandered about the stone walls that enclosed the meadow. Some corncrakes were giving their voices to the day. The scent of meadow-sweet was heavy from the night dew. A nest of late yellow-hammers were dodging about an old thorn bush that hung like a weary thing over the corner of a wall. Stephen Keetly leaned his elbows on the wall beside it, a fitting companion. He watched the young birds hopping about the grey stones, an ancient wisdom in his face. Then his eyes wandered

to the mountains and followed the great rhythm that set up against the break of day in the sky. He had come very close to the things that are eternal, yet there was a pensiveness in the face, some tremor in the sunken lips, perhaps a thought that some harvest day near at hand a wind would go by and he would hear a stir in the grass.

"There is no sign of Luke," Festus Hynes said.

"No sign at all."

They gathered about a wooden gate at a corner of the meadow, something in their grouping that suggested the animals of the fields. The scythes were lying on the grass at hand.

"You will hear from Michael before the month is out," Martin Dempsey said to James Kane.

"Michael used to be a good warrant to write from England in the harvest," James Kane said. "But I don't know now. His thoughts are pulling one way and another. His mind is no longer with me."

"He is thinking of looking out for himself. I thought that those months back. I remarked it a week back, when I saw him going to gather the frauhans with Nancy Sweeney's daughter."

"Aye, she is drawing him away from me."

"He is the age when the change comes, James."

James drew the hone from his belt, walked over to the scythe, and took it up slowly. Standing the handle on the ground he began to sharpen the blade. He did so with a certain deliberation, as if his thoughts were still dwelling upon the son who had been seen gathering frauhans with Nancy Sweeney's daughter.

"Will he bring her into the house to you, James?"

He stopped sharpening the blade. "It would be a poor place to bring her," he said.

"He'll bring home what will put him over the expense of the marrying. That is as far as he will look."

"Well," said James Kane, a note of resentment in his tone, "God bless all happy couples!"

"Forty years ago, and forty-five years ago, I saw the men tossing the hay in this meadow," Stephen Keetly was saying to Festus Hynes as they stood by the gate. "Margaret Mulvehill was a spruce woman then, for I remember her coming up with a baby at her breast. And the baby was Luke's mother."

"Make the Sign of the Cross, James, and cut the first of the grass."

"In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," James said, as three sweeps of the blade rang in the grass. He stood up then, leaning on the shaft of the scythe.

"How many acres in it, Martin?"

"Four acres and a perch or two."

"We won't feel it."

"If I had a good scythe I would not be afraid of it."

"Man, you should have a blade in your hand that would be as keen as the east wind. What happened you not to buy the good scythe?"

"What happened me, is it? Can't you ask me why I did not buy ships on the sea?"

"Will there be a break in the weather, Stephen?" Festus Hynes was asking Stephen Keetly by the gate.

"We might have showers."

"It would be a great loss if the break come and the harvest at hand."

They lifted their scythes at length. Festus Hynes, the only one who wore a coat, took it off, and laid it rolled up under the wall. They began to hone the worn blades, pausing now and again. There was some reluctance in the manner they came to the grass, drawing deliberate strokes that had in them both a skill and a tradition. Martin Dempsey paused for a little. His blade had rasped upon a stone. He took the stone in his hand, turning it over as if it were a curiosity. The other three observed him with interest, standing away from each other in the line of work.

"The greatest ground for stones I ever saw was a place they let out in grass in the parish of Kilgloss," Festus Hynes said. "I worked there but the once. It left my blade as jagged as the bloody blade of a peeler."

"Oftentimes a man won't see the stone until he has drawn the stroke," Stephen Keetly said. He stroked the weird beard under his chin.

Martin Dempsey tucked his pants about his loins and walked with the stone over to the wall, dropping it behind it. He performed the ceremony with the air of one who had a conscience. The others followed him with their eyes as if they had appreciation. It took some time before they got back to the grass. Martin Dempsey had to spit in both his fists. James Kane took off his soft hat and turned the brim of it down. Festus Hynes made a great scratching about his chest. Stephen Keetly ranged his eyes over the hills. The backs of the four institutions were bended, the scythes swinging back and forth with a slow rhythm, the fallen grass like a wave in their wake, when Luke Cusack opened the gate

and came into the meadow. The men stood up leaning on their scythes.

"God bless the work!" Luke said, coming up to them in his slow gait, as if his limbs were reluctant.

"You too, you too."

"What way is the hand, Luke?"

"I'm rid of the sling and the knuckle is healing."

"I knew a man one time that got a cut in the wrist and the hand twisted about on him till the sinews contracted. It left him a cripple from that out."

"What sort is the meadow, Martin?"

"A good heavy crop, with substance in it. I would not say but you'll have better fodder for the winter than Mark. Those river meadows do be luscious, giving a hay that is rank."

"I hold with you there, Martin," Festus Hynes said. "A gross grain is in the river meadows, but if Mark would turn round and throw a shaking of coarse salt through it the time he is putting it in the haggard, the beasts would benefit."

The talk went on. The mowers took a certain tone of authority. They were in possession of the meadow until it was down—it was at their mercy for the time being, so to speak. Luke knew it was expected of him to take a deferential note to the men, expressed by innuendo in the course of the conversation. These men were the autocrats of his farm until the harvest was in. He knew exactly what was expected of him both in manner and treatment. He helped Mary Dempsey up with the jars of porter at the mid-day. They sat under the wall taking the refreshment out of mugs, the look of seers in their faces, their views on all things dogmatic. With

the appearance of the jars also came Murt Cooney. His stick came in over the wall and his figure followed it. His pleasant, bright complexion was in contrast to the rather drawn grey faces of the old men. He walked to the hay as if it was an overpowering interest in it that had drawn him to the place. He followed the line of the work with interest, hobbling in his bare feet, exacting with himself for fear he would miss anything. The mowers who sat under the wall, their knotty fingers about the mugs, beheld him with approval.

"Powerful men," Murt Cooney muttered to himself, just loud enough to be overheard.

"Come over here, Murt," Luke Cusack said at last.

Murt Cooney started. He turned around as if he was only aware of the presence and occupation of the others for the first time. He drew away with discretion, at once making for the gate.

"Some other time, Luke," he said, excusing himself.

"Come here when I tell you."

"Sure I only wanted to see the meadow. 'Pon my faith, that is all. I was going by on the road."

"Murt Cooney," said Stephen Keetly, "don't have the impertinence to say against the decent man that bids you over."

"I never meant offence; that the ground may open and swallow me if I did," Murt Cooney said, coming over, his crooked eye roving about.

"Fill him out a mouthful of that," Luke Cusack said to Mary Dempsey. The girl poured out a mug of porter until it flowed over the rim. She knew her business. The Cusacks had always the name of being flahoulic.

"Mary," said Murt Cooney, as he took the measure from her, "that I may never see another harvest until I drive at your hauling home. That you may get a fellow with the spirits of the devil in him, for you are leaping out of your skin."

"I saw a young girl married in the barony of Lisnaree once," Festus Hynes, who was prolific in reminiscences, droned, "she was as hearty and as full-blooded a young creature as man ever led to the altar. I had my shoulder under her coffin a week after, staggering over the graves in Clonmarleh, where her generations were buried."

Mary Dempsey, who should, no doubt, feel depressed at this warning, laughed. She only saw an absurd little man from whose lips a yellow tooth obtruded.

"We might as well go on with the cutting of the grass," James Kane said, conscious that Murt Cooney's crooked eye was upon him, as he swallowed the measure of porter at a draught. It took some time to get back to the actual work. A sort of ritual, made up of little movements and mannerisms, had to be got through before the sound of the blades tearing through the grass was heard.

"Great oul' men, that's what they are," Luke Cusack said as he beheld them from a seat he had taken on a stone, his back to the wall, the jar between his legs. "Mary," he said to the girl as she went out of the gate, "don't have the men's dinner late. Tell Martha that they don't like the bacon too done, or the cabbage either."

Just then a song came up from the valley. It was a song that had never been heard in Clonlea before. The

old men paused in their work to listen. Murt Cooney raised his stout stick and kept it in the air. He struck the attitude of a prophet.

"What is that?" Stephen Keetly asked.

"It is like as if all the corncrakes of the country were scratching together in the valley," Martin Dempsey said. James Kane raised his head with an energetic toss.

"Men," said Murt Cooney, "that is the new mower."

"The new mower?"

"Aye, the machine for cutting."

"Who in hell has it?"

"Mark Cusack. He is in the river meadows."

Luke Cusack took a draught of porter from a mug. Then he stood up.

"Don't heed that, men," he said. "Go on with your work."

But the men with the scythes stood listening. Perhaps they had some sense of the import of the moment. At last Festus Hynes spoke. "I knew a man once who was in face of machinery," he said. "One day it ripped him open."

They went back to their work. It is worth telling that they put more energy into their strokes. The song in the valley below carried with it the impetus of competition. But they were more silent, and their silence was sullen. When Stephen Keetly spoke again he betrayed the trend of their thoughts.

"Mark Cusack is a great man," he said. "I always said it, and I'll not go back of my words now." The tone was one that betrayed insincerity.

"I liked him," James Kane said. There was a dryness in the words.

"We all liked him," Martin Dempsey added. He spoke in the past tense.

"He was the best man we ever had if he was left alone," Murt Cooney, who was lighting his pipe, added. "But now he's in with that other fellow."

"The Yank?"

"Aye."

"I'll tell you what put me against young Nilan from the first," Festus Hynes said. "He strips the teeth when he smiles. They do be shining like the teeth of a cur that has an ugly temper."

"I'll go down now and I will watch them in the meadow," Murt Cooney said. He put his stick out over the wall and his plump body followed it.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MOWING MACHINE.

Brendan Nilan felt that morning in the meadow that he was having his first triumph in Clonlea. When he and Mark led the horses into the meadow they had a short discussion as to who should get into the seat and do the piloting.

"Now, it's not as simple as it looks, Mark," Brendan Nilan said. He spoke quietly and drily. It was about the first time he had had the upper hand of Mark Cusack in a matter of practical knowledge on the farm.

"There is no mystery about it, and I'm not an *amadan* out and out," Mark said. "I saw mowing machines at work before now."

"That may be," the other agreed, with provoking toleration. "Before I came to Clonlea I saw a wheelbarrow, yet nevertheless I could not manage a wheelbarrow with a load when first I tried. It went right over, cargo and all. Dominick can tell you that."

Dominick, who stood by, greatly interested in the new venture, grinned and nodded.

"All right," Mark said, "I'll let you have your way. Up you get."

"It's nothing new to me," Brendan Nilan said, stepping nimbly into the seat, shaped like a great overgrown leaf. He fingered up the reins carefully and took all his bearings with deliberation.

"I say, Mark," he said, "you'd better take the mare by the head for a bit. She's restive and likely to dance

about at the noise at first. Now, I want her to go right in a bee-line round that grass. I'll get her to do it in time, you bet."

Mark grinned as he listened to the chat and directions of the frail but alert-looking person perched on the mowing machine. He went to the mare, took her by the head, and mockingly touched his hat to his cousin.

"Yes, yer honor," he said.

"Now for it. Are you right there, Dominick? Get your rake ready and follow the band from the rere. We'll want you to clear the road at the corners. Lord, I do feel good!"

He sniffed at the air, his eyes wandering over the waving meadow as it sloped down to the river. Beyond the river on the opposite bank was a wood that gradually rose on the steady ascent to Slieve Gorm. As his eyes caught the flash of colours of the meadow in the morning light he remembered last year how he had watched the old reapers at their work and longed to paint it all as he saw it—paint it so that the beholder would exclaim, "In the flash of colours of the meadow in the morning light, I get the odour of new mown hay!" For did not the first man to whom Millet showed his "Angelus" cry, "I hear the bells ring." But now, this morning, conscious still as he was of the beauty of the early harvest scene, he wanted nothing so badly as to bring down the meadow with the mower. "And that's progress—in Clonlea!" he told himself with secret delight.

As he had anticipated, the mare was a bit restive and she did do some step dancing as they made the first sweep of the meadow. Mark soothed and encouraged her as well as he could. A few times, as she hitched about,

the American had something to do to keep his seat, and his face was a mixture of anger and the fear of a humiliating fiasco. Still the creak of the machine and the feeling that a wave of fallen grass lay in their wake gave him something of a thrill. Blackbird, like the philosophical animal which he was, went as directed, and by his conduct went far to persuade the more incredulous mare that they were really engaged in a refined form of ploughing with a good deal of noise thrown in. The mare still expressed her suspicions, even when she abandoned her side-steps, by constant flickings of the ears back and forth, by blowing impatient breaths and nervous twitchings of the muscles of the body.

When they had made the first lap of one side of the meadow, the American pulled up, sprang from his seat and looked back. The alignment was not right. There were gaps and jagged patches wherever the mare had made trouble. Still it was a beginning, and the grass had come down. He sprang back on the seat and drew his team around for the sweep of grass that ran parallel with the river. Again the blades sang as they cut into the grass. They went on in silence. Mark walking by the mare, the American piloting from his perch, Dominick behind with his rake ready to remove congestion of grass at the turnings. Once Brendan Nilan was conscious of a figure standing away and leaning on a stick, taking in the situation from a distance. It was Murt Cooney. Later he saw that Luke Cusack also came to behold the work. He, too, stood away as if loath to come near. Mrs. Cusack came to the meadow gate, and stood looking at them, her hands shading her eyes, and as they passed her she waved her hand in encouragement. When

they passed the gate on the next round, Luke was standing beside her, his figure leaning crouching over the gate, his smouldering eyes like the eyes of a setter. When the machine stopped to round the corner his voice could be heard in the sudden quiet.

"Mark has a good job now if he minds it. He's lackey to the Yank—dog boy to the big little man from America."

Brendan Nilan grinned. Mark swung round on his heels and strode over to the gate. What he said was spoken in a low voice, and having spoken it he strode back tc the machine again. Brendan Nilan saw Luke drag his legs slowly up the next field to his own territory. His mother was still at the meadow gate, now pulling her fingers nervously, so that Brendan Nilan knew that she was agitated.

"What's the row about now?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"Nothing," Mark answered, shortly. "So, on with the work."

They were some hours in the meadow when the first note of discord was heard. It came from the wood the other side of the river. At first the voices of boys and girls, later reinforced by the shouts of men and women, broke out in the harvest day. It was a cry of derision and protest now and then ending in a groan. Mark Cusack tilted his head at the first note of it, listened for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. When the mower came to a stop he said, "I half expected this."

"Why, what does it mean?"

"It means that machinery is not welcome in Clonlea. It is putting men out of their jobs."

"But who are they?"

"Mostly from Talam-na-ocras."

"The people who are trying to get out of that congested district, that stink-pot?"

"The same."

"It beats me."

"There are wire-pullers at the back of it. Loftus Lynch does not like the idea of it. I daresay there are free drinks to be had to-day."

They went on with their work. The shouts and groans came more lustily from the wood. Figures were seen moving about in the trees and the brushwood. They had found very good ambush. A little after noon stray people came to the place attracted by the shouts, gathered that some trouble was brewing and retired. Among those who came was Martha. She came into the meadow, looking at the work, smiled encouragement. When the mower was passing the end nearest the river a few light sounds were made on the ground. Stones were being thrown. Mark Cusack's face darkened. He knew it was the work of thoughtless young fellows, but trouble always began at that source. He had a prospect of future disputes and policemen coming on the scene—a development he did not like. He stood for a moment looking across the river to take in the situation. Heads were ducked behind the brushwood. Then there was a plunge and a shout near the mower. A stray stone had caught the mare on the snout. She pranced and reared and made an attempt to bolt. He had her by the head in a moment. But in that moment Brendan Nilan was shot out of his seat on the machine and came down on the ground straight on the head. He rolled over, lay still for a little, then raised his head. He was quite

white, his eyes dazed. There was a derisive shout from the wood. Mark Cusack spoke quietly to Dominick.

"Take the mare by the head," he said, and Dominick obeyed. Then he went to his cousin, raising him up.

"Are you hurt?"

"Only dazed. I'll be all right."

Martha, who had followed the scene from some distance, came running down to the spot. She knelt beside the American, as Mark held him propped up in a sitting posture.

"Was he struck?" she asked.

"No, I fell, and came on my head."

"The brutes!"

"You had better get home," Mark said. "I will help you."

"No, no. The work must go on. Don't abandon the work."

The American was full of appeal as he turned to Mark.

"All right," Mark said, helping him to his feet. He swayed a little as he tried to walk.

"Perhaps you will help me," he said to Martha. She supported him at once. With her aid he was able to get along.

"Go on, Mark, you take my place."

Mark got into the seat of the mower and Dominick went to the mare. The mowing went on, Brendan Nilan smiling faintly as he was helped to the gate by Martha. As they made their way rather slowly along a path that led to the road they met Luke Cusack coming to the meadow. He stood stark still as he saw his wife, her arm under Brendan Nilan as she helped him along.

"What in God——" he began, and then pulled up.

"There has been an accident," Martha said. "They threw stones, your cousin was knocked down and hurt."

"Serve him damn well right," Luke said, staring at his cousin.

"Thanks, Luke. You are very good."

"Interfering where you were not wanted," Luke said.

"Oh, Luke, for shame!" his wife cried, some passion in her voice. "Can't you see he's hurt!"

"As for you," Luke said, "what brought you away from your business? Get back to your own place, and that mighty quick."

"The man is not able to walk by himself."

"Then let him lie down if he's not."

"Luke!"

"Take your hands from him."

With sudden passion Luke stepped towards his wife, caught the arm that was supporting Brendan Nilan, and jerked at it roughly.

"I'll see this fellow home," Luke added, pushing his wife back. She was panting with excitement, humiliation and resentment in her face.

"Go home quietly," Brendan Nilan said. "I'm very sorry for all this trouble."

Martha hesitated, looked as if a torrent of pent-up feeling would break from her, checked herself and walked along the path for the road, her tall, elegant figure erect, dignified, but, to the eyes of Brendan Nilan, tragical as she went along. Luke had put his arm around his cousin when the latter tottered and swayed during the scene.

"Look lively now," Luke said, "I'll leave you up at the house."

Brendan Nilan groped unsteadily for the wall a few yards from them, his hands out for its support.

"Take your hands from me," he said, huskily. "Don't touch me."

Luke withdrew his support, leaving the other holding on to the wall.

"I thought as much," Luke said, bitterly. "You don't want me."

"No, I don't."

"You want my wife. You like her arm about you, don't you, you damned little viper."

"Don't speak to me. Go away."

Luke, who had done a good deal of drinking out of the jars of porter in his meadow, laughed hoarsely as the other swayed by the wall.

"You're nearly done digging," he said. "The machinery has put the hand of death about your white face. You'll never live to take the land off Mark, and you'll never see the day you'll best me. Do you hear me, Yankee-doodle? You'll never best me, I'm the boy for you."

"Go away."

"You'll be going away pretty soon, and a longer journey than you came. Didn't you think you were a great one, with women to lead you up from the meadow? Go home now and give your poor bones a rest."

Mrs. Cusack came running down the field from the road. Martha had given her some account of what had happened.

"My God!" she cried, looking at Brendan Nilan, "you're hurt. Luke, why don't you help him?"

"He wouldn't let me touch him. He's too particular."

Brendan Nilan swayed unsteadily as his aunt went to him, his eyes closing in spite of himself, his pallor growing more noticeable.

"He's fainting," Luke said. But the other recovered after a little, and was able to make his way home with the help of his aunt. Luke followed them into the house, his eyes bloodshot and sulky, his cheeks hectic.

The old woman met them in the hallway and helped the invalid into the room. He sank into an armchair with a sigh.

"What happened you at all?" the old woman asked.

"I'll tell you presently, granny," Brendan Nilan said. "It's nothing."

"He fell over a wisp of hay," Luke croaked from near the door. "The heat of the sun preyed on him and he was nearly melting."

The old woman shuffled out the door, motioning Luke before her; then, when the room door was closed behind them, she turned to Luke.

"You have no more nature in you than a weasel," she said, her old frame shaking with passion.

"Oh, sure I know, granny. To be sure. I'm of no account. I'm only the dung on the road. The pet's propped up in the parlour."

"Leave this house," the old woman said, moving him down towards the porch.

"The dirty kick-out. That's what I'm fit for. Nilan will sell you all yet. He's sucking the blood out of the Cusacks, and the devil and hell's cure to them."

"Don't aggravate me," the old woman said. "If you do, you will regret it."

"You miserable old hag, who cares a jack straw for you? Is it me? Not a pinch of snuff do I care for you now."

He stood at the door for a moment hesitating. He hiccoughed and began to speak again. "As for Yankee-doodle within," he began, but said no more. The old woman's stick came down with a thud on his back and he went staggering down the path to the front gate as the porch door closed with a bang.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SHADOWS IN A HOUSE OF SHADOWS."

When the day closed, Mark Cusack sat smoking in the sittingroom with Brendan Nilan.

Occasional shouts and jeers broke out among the hills. They grew more frequent and nearer as the night advanced. Then horns began to blow. Mark Cusack smiled.

"One effect of this will be," he said, "that no man in the countryside will now take the mower on hire."

"Why not?"

"They will be afraid. It is now unpopular; we are enemies of the people."

"What fools!"

"Oh, it won't last. It is just an effort of Loftus Lynch to turn the people against me, so that he may check the migration scheme. He wants to keep that congested district where it is and how it is. A great part of his revenue comes from Talam-na-ocras. They are all in his books. If they move out of that, his business will shrink."

A shout and a blast of horns sounded outside on the road. Mark rose, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and sauntered out to the little gate. A groan came up like a sullen boom from the distance. He stayed leaning over the gate smoking. The horn blowing went on for some time, but from a greater distance. He came back to the room.

"These were things that had meaning in the Land War," he said. "The tyranny of the lords drove the people into a sort of guerilla warfare. They fought in the only way that was open to them to fight. But there was a principle at the back of it, and men were not afraid to put up with the consequences of their acts. This thing to-night is merely a degradation of once effective agitation; there is nothing at the back of it except a couple of barrels of porter. I'll blow the froth off it in a week." And he leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes.

Next morning Brendan Nilan, a little pale, and Mark Cusack resumed their work in the meadows. Mark Cusack carried a fowling-piece under his arm and placed it under his coat in a corner of the field. It was after noon before some jeering and groaning came from the wood. It went on for some time. They took no notice of it. Then the little pad-pad of stones began to sound on the ground. Mark Cusack walked over to his coat, took the gun from under it, and walked down to the river. A yell of derision greeted him. But the voices sounded further off through the trees. After a little time a group of stampeding figures, mostly girls and boys, broke from a clump of trees, in full retreat up the hill. Mark raised the gun. A shot rang out over the place. A great innocent gull, sweeping the landscape with lazy wings, suddenly swerved in its flight, darted some feet in the air, then came to earth with a thud. It fell at the feet of the shrieking group, its wings spread out on the grass, a thin, bloody streak flowing from its open beak.

The youngsters turned from the spot in terror and scampered as fast as they could for home. Mark Cusack

smiled, and went back with the gun to his coat. A low howl of masculine voices came from the wood.

"They are minus their scouts," he said, coming back to the mower. "We will see what will happen next."

"I'm sorry for the gull," Brendan Nilan said; "after all, it had nothing to do with the quarrel."

"Its troubles are over. Go on with the work."

An hour later, Murt Cooney came stumping into the meadow, making straight for the mower.

"This is nice work, Mark Cusack," he said.

"I'm glad you like it, Murt," Mark Cusack said; "some of the people don't."

"I'm not talking about your yoke," Murt Cooney put in, pointing a derisive stick at the mower. "I'm talking about the way you frightened my Delia and little Sylvester. They came into us shaking with fear, livid in the face, Delia retching with sickness and fright on the floor. They say you shot at them; and I'm going to see about it. I'm a poor man, but I'll have my childer respected, and I'll have the law of you."

"Very good, Murt, have the law of me."

"And you," said Murt Cooney, turning a wicked crooked eye some yards about Brendan Nilan—"And you won't be let trample on the people of Clonlea if you were a Yank forty times over."

Brendan Nilan pointed a straight finger at the meadow gate.

"Git," he said.

"By God!" Murt Cooney swore, raising his stout stick.

Mark Cusack strode over to him, got him by the back of the neck, and, swinging him round, gave him the

quick march over to the gate. A final jerk sent him out the exit without dignity.

"I'll make you pay for this, Cusack," he cried, gathering himself together.

Mark Cusack looked out over the gate at him, smiling pleasantly.

"No, Murt," he said, "make Loftus Lynch pay for it. Give him a good account of how you behaved yourself. Don't be too particular about the truth."

Murt Cooney struck the top of the gate with his stick, as Mark Cusack strode back to the mower.

"Your brother Luke is a man," he shouted, "and you're finished in Clonlea."

But Murt Cooney made no effort to come into the meadow again.

"Vermin," said Brendan Nilan, as he watched the plump little man stumping back to the road.

There was quiet in Clonlea that night. There were no groans about the Cusack farm, and no horns sounded on the hills.

"The froth has been blown off," Brendan Nilan said. Mark Cusack shrugged his shoulders. "Read something," he said. "That strange play about the woman in Norway—that Nora girl. You were at the passage where she danced for the husband."

"I have not got the book," Brendan Nilan replied; "Martha took it away some days ago."

"That is curious. I was just thinking that that woman was like Martha, in a different way, of course."

"Yes—in a different way," Brendan said, thoughtfully.

At the same moment Martha was moving about the

house on the hill restlessly. She had been turning out odd things from trunks, looking over photographs, reading snatches of odd letters. Now and then she put her hand to her head, for it throbbed ceaselessly. A blue mark showed on her temple. She pressed it with the palm of her hand at intervals. Now she moved about the bedroom in the dim light, looking out the window occasionally, marking the sweep of the landscape, the tall trees dark against the pale sky. The place was very still, and she was abnormally conscious of the loneliness of the house. She moved across the room, her shadow blurred on the boards. She went down the stairs and into the kitchen. Some sods were burning on the hearth and she fixed them up, moving aimlessly about the place. The flickering light of the fire threw her shadows on the white walls of the kitchen. She was conscious of this, and stood thinking it over for a little. "A house of loneliness," she thought, "of shadows. I used not to notice these things. Now——"

She opened the door and looked out, a great peace was over the land, only the barking of a dog or the cry of an animal in the field breaking the silence. Clouds were banking up on the pale sky. The shadows of the trees and the walls were heavy on the green fields. The quiet forms of some sheep lying in the pasture, their whiteness marked, added to the drowsiness of the prospect. Martha was more conscious of all the blotches that made up the shadows on the hills and they oppressed her. "A house of shadows in a land of shadows," she thought and closed the door. Returning to the kitchen, she lifted a lamp and looked up at a little shelf of volumes on the wall, but her expression was of weariness.

"Before I could read," she thought. "Now——" and her hand began to fiddle with the books aimlessly. She took down one and sat by the fire. But her mind wandered from the reading, and she closed the book. She sat perfectly still by the fire, giving herself up to one of those spells of thought—one of those mental battles fought in a dread silence—which mark the milestones in so many human destinies. The night had come on before she wakened up to her surroundings. She looked about the kitchen, and all the familiar things there appeared new and strange.

"I must go to bed and sleep—if I can," she thought, rose, and put out the lamp. She had begun to attend to the fire—to put the red sods under the ashes—when a step sounded outside. She paused and sat down by the fire. The steps outside had a familiar sound of uncertainty. In a few moments Luke came into the kitchen. He looked about for a little, and then came lurching once or twice, to the hearth. He groped for a chair and sat down opposite his wife.

"Well?" he said, after a bit.

"Well?" Martha replied, her voice level and without any emotion.

"What way is the Yank?" Luke asked, his tone vicious, his breath wafting a smell of alcohol across the hearth.

"I believe he is better."

"He got good attention. I don't like that fellow."

"You have said so often enough."

"And I don't like the way I caught you with him."

Martha looked across the hearth at her husband for a moment, then rose.

"I'm going to bed," she said.

"No, you're not. Sit down there."

Martha remained standing.

"I say I don't like the way I caught you with Nilan."

"Caught me?" Martha queried, her voice low but vibrant.

"Aye, caught you. What had you your arm about him for? Tell me that."

"You are drunk."

Luke got to his feet.

"Insults is all you have for me," he said, "but I'm not going to put up with it any longer. I've enough of you and your damn moods, and I tell you I have my eye on you and the Yank. I'm not a fool. I see something in his eyes when he looks at you; he's always around where you are, and how lucky you should be the one to wind your arms round him when he fell in the meadow. You're very willing to hug him, aren't you?"

Martha walked away from the fire, and Luke stepped after her.

"Do you hear me?" he cried.

"You are drunk. If you were not——" Martha's voice was beginning to betray her passion.

"None of your back answers. I won't have them. Do you hear me, I'll be the boss here."

He caught her by the arm in a tight grip.

"I told you last night," Martha said, "that if you struck me again I would leave your house."

"Oh, you're a high and mighty lady, aren't you? Leave my house, indeed! Where to? Back to Ballyrea? They'd be glad to see you, wouldn't they? And you'd be leaving a hell of a lot behind you here. To be sure,

we'd never be able to keep house without you. The childer would be all crying out for their mother, wouldn't they?"

Martha wrenched her arm away from him and went upstairs to her room. Luke looked vaguely around the kitchen, sat down by the fire again, and took the inevitable bottle from his pocket. He sat taking swigs from it for some time. When he rose he was more unsteady on his feet than ever.

"Martha!" he said. The house was silent. He fumbled up the stairs and groped at her door. It was locked.

"Are you there, Martha?"

There was no reply. He tapped gently on the panels of the door.

"Do you hear, Martha? Let me in. I want to explain. I want to tell you. It's not me fault. I want to tell you what has upset me. Will you let me in?"

There was no reply.

"God is my judge, Martha, I won't say a cross word. That I may be as dead as my father if I do! I want to explain. I'm in fault, I know that, but it's not me fault. Do you hear me, Martha?"

He fumbled about the door, muttering and mumbling, but there was no response.

"Martha, don't rise me. Be friends with me. Don't heed what I said. Give us a kiss, anyhow. Martha, do you hear, won't you give us a kiss?"

There was another pause. Luke wagged his head about, foolish-looking and purposeless, as a toy-donkey nodding its head. Then he began to grumble and com-

plain, finally raising his unsteady voice, and began to beat the panels of the door with his fists with all his might.

"I'll get in if I was to break in," he cried. But his energy evaporated quite suddenly, and he stumbled away, going into another room, from whence, in a little time, steady, powerful snores sounded.

The lock clicked in Martha's door, and she came quietly out of the room, hurrying down to the kitchen. She struck a match and looked anxiously at the clock. It was close to midnight. She put on a hat and coat hurriedly, took a rug on her arm, slipped out of the house and ran, stumbling and trembling, for the road in the valley. She pulled up when near Cusack's house, and passed it on her toes, slipping quietly out by the haggard and the stile. Suddenly her heart made a wild flutter. A voice had addressed her, and in the dim light she saw that the window at the back of the house was wide open, and that somebody sat, leaning out, there. The voice was the voice of Brendan Nilan.

"Who is that?" he asked.

Martha stopped for a moment, her hand on her bosom. She made no reply, but slipped into the haggard.

"Is that Martha?"

The voice of Brendan Nilan was low and quick. Martha was conscious that there was an eagerness, almost a tense hope, in the tone that startled her. She fled for the road. Presently her ears caught the rattle of a car over the road. As it came near she walked into the middle of the road, raised her arm, and cried, "Hello!" The sidecar was painted red, a parcel basket on the well, the Royal initials painted at the back. The driver pulled

up the conveyance that carried the mails from Cuangorm to Ballyrea.

" Who is that?" the driver asked.

" It is I," Martha said. " I want you to give me a seat to Ballyrea."

" Oh, Mrs. Cusack," the driver said, surprise in his voice. He turned down the side of the car, and Martha got up.

" My mother is ill," she said, a little hurriedly, " and I am anxious to see her. That is why I asked for the seat."

" You're welcome, ma'am," the driver said, stolidly, as he whipped up the horse, and they rattled away from Clonlea.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THE OLD FAMILIAR JUICE."

MARK CUSACK and Brendan Nilan were allowed to complete their meadow cutting with the mower without further persecution. Brendan Nilan was wont to say that the blood of the gull shot by Mark had appeased the anger of Bacchus.

But when the grass was down the work of the new mower came to an end. There were no offers by neighbouring farmers to hire it out. They all had the men with the scythes, and those of them who had half contracted to hire the mower sent polite intimations that, on consideration, they had changed their minds.

"Changed the devil," Brendan Nilan said, with some anger. "They haven't got any minds of their own to change. They are——"

"Now," Mark Cusack interrupted, his manner unruffled, "don't ride off on another cheap tirade. There is nothing so easy as the high moral tone, once you get into the stride of it. You must have some patience. The people are coming out of a cycle that was a series of terrorisms of one kind or another. The reaction has set in. They will go to any extreme now for a fair sail before the wind."

"Yes, but this shrinking from unpopularity is really too much," Brendan Nilan argued. "I believe you are whitening a little behind the gills yourself because you have had a little unpopularity."

Mark Cusack shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll hear that machine shrieking in every holding in the parish next year," he said. "The people will be glad to have it. It will follow the best families like the *bean sidhe*. What I am concerned with now is the saving of the hay. The men and women I have every year to toss and save it have sent polite word to say that they can't come, that they have been engaged by Luke."

"Oh, I see," Brendan Nilan mused.

"That is what they mean by saying that hay will rot on the ground in Clonlea this year."

"Yes, they expect to have the last laugh."

"It's up against you again, Mark. I'll go halves with you."

"Halves with me in what?"

"In a new hay tosser."

"I have thought of that. I won't do it—this year. Next year, perhaps. This year we must see this thing through ourselves. We have Dominick and mother to help us, and maybe the Conneelys. Maurteen is as good as two, the best cock-maker in Clonlea. I'll talk him into it."

They were strolling down the white dusty road as they spoke.

"Who is taking my name in vain?" Maurteen Conneely said, as he vaulted over an iron gate.

They explained the situation. Maurteen Conneely said he was ready to stand in. The talk drifted into other channels.

"I was coming down from the upland this evening," Maurteen Conneely said, "and a white piece of paper kept

blowing in front of me on the grass. It kept twisting and turning before me so much that in the end I stooped and picked it up. There was writing upon it, and I can't make out what it means, though the wording is plain enough. I think you ought to give it back to Luke, Mark." Maurteen Conneely held out the slip of paper. Mark took it, struck a match and read the writing. He put it into his pocket.

"All right, Maurteen," he said.

When he and Brendan Nilan were strolling back to the house, Maurteen Conneely having gone home, Mark appeared to have grown thoughtful.

"I wonder what can it mean?" he said at last, musingly.

"What can what mean?" Brendan Nilan asked.

"The writing on this paper."

He took it out, struck a match and held it shaded from the wind while Brendan Nilan read these words:—

"To Luke.—I must have some peace and am going to Ballyrea. I will let you know what I intend doing in a few days. Make the excuse to the others that I have been called to my mother, who is ill. Don't follow me or make a fuss.—Martha."

It was the message Martha had left the night she stole from her home on the hill.

Brendan Nilan handed the paper back to Mark Cusack.

"So her mother has not really been ill," he said, slowly.

"No," Mark agreed, "something has happened."

As they drew near to the house, Mark spoke again. My belief is," he said, "that Martha has left Luke."

"Left Luke?"

"Yes, and that she won't come back again. Her life must have been a hell with him."

Brendan Nilan made no comment for some time. He cleared his throat with an effort when he spoke again. "But where can she go?"

"I don't know."

"She can't live in Ballyrea."

"No—that would be too near. She will most likely go to America."

A long silence followed. They went into the house slowly. Mark turned into the sittingroom off the hall.

"I am going to bed," Brendan Nilan said. He went into the bedroom and stood there in the dark, his quick breaths filling the room.

"To America!" he kept saying to himself over and over again. He went over to the window, opened it and stood looking out, then leaned over the sill. Shadowy and dark against the dim sky, the house of Luke Cusack loomed up on the crest of the hill. His eyes were fastened upon it, quick thoughts and rapid plans forming in his head, beating like hammer strokes into his heated brain, every sentence ending with the words that were becoming more and more pregnant with a magic that sent the blood jumping through his veins—"To America." He was quite unconscious of his surroundings or the passing of time until he heard Mark's voice behind him.

"Hello!" Mark said, "I thought you were gone to bed."

Brendan Nilan drew into the room. "No," he said, "I was just looking out of the window."

"All this time?"

"Yes."

"But there was nothing to see. It is dark without."

"I was just thinking, and the night is sometimes helpful to the thinker."

"The dreamer, I should say," Mark corrected, as he prepared for bed.

"Perhaps that, too."

"I hope you won't become moody," Mark said, "moody people are so uncomfortable, always up in the clouds, and never any good."

"Thanks," Brendan Nilan replied, laughing a little. "But I don't agree with you. People who range to the clouds often do things."

"Nothing except to flap their wings or sing a little song," Mark said.

"And is that not doing something?"

"Not anything worth talking about. Leave it to the lark—you'll never do it any better than he does it. He has a great knack for that sort of business; imagines the whole outfit was got up for his special benefit, and so takes to it natural like. Fills the whole heavens, mocks at the clouds, swings round in circles, makes you look up at him, cheats you into listening, and when he goes out of sight you are sure he is a heavenly spirit, a secret messenger carrying tales to the stars, down he swoops to the worms, for he has only gone up for an appetite. He's a rare playboy, is that same skylark."

"You are becoming romantic, Mark," Brendan Nilan replied. "Go to bed and dream of hay and corn."

"And of mowing machines, tossing machines, binders, and threshers," Mark said, pulling off his socks.

"I'm going out for a walk," Brendan Nilan said, suddenly.

"A walk this hour of the night?"

"Why not?"

"You're getting daft, man alive. Tumble into bed. You have to be up at cock-crow. There's plenty of work to be done to-morrow."

"I'll be up all right. But I'm going out now. I want to get the scent on the hill, to feel the play of the wind and to listen to the talk of the trees."

"Good heavens, you're as mad as a March hare. The trees don't talk. They only groan when the storm threatens them."

"They talk much better than you. I'm going out to listen." And he crept softly out of the house.

There was a light vapour springing from the earth when Brendan Nilan turned down the road in the direction of Cuangorm. It had a fresh, wet scent, and he sniffed at it with satisfaction, his mind filled with an unaccustomed exaltation, the darkness and stillness very much in harmony with the spirit of illusion which he had been building up for some hours. Bumble bees whirred through the air, and as he walked along the smell of the new mown hay became more pronounced. As he went he was conscious of a rough voice singing somewhere in the distance. He stood under the boughs of some great chestnut trees, but they were extraordinarily still, their rigidness against the faint light of the sky striking him as curious. Not as much as a leaf stirred, bunches of the prickly nuts drooping vaguely from the branches. As he stood there the harsh song grew distinct enough to destroy his enjoyment of the many delicate incenses

wafted on the damp air. To his mind the late summer night was a ritual in which invisible thuribles were swung by hidden acolytes, all subtly ministering to his peculiar mood, all Nature a poem, a religion, an act of devotion, an hour of magic for the expanding soul. He shrank back in the deep shadow of the tree as the voice of the unbeliever, the heretic, grew more and more robust, more rudely grating. It was impossible for him to ignore the interruption. It was insistent in its brutal realism, nerve-racking in its out-of-tune notes, compelling in its crudeness. He felt himself able to distinguish the words of the chorus, roared out with a vigour that cracked the vocal chord:

"So three cheers for the Land League
And nine for Murty Hynes."

Out of the night an indistinct figure came lurching along the road. Brendan Nilan was hoping that the wayfarer would pass without observing him. But the figure stood, and even in the dim light he could not mistake its outlines.

"Hello, Maurteen, and is that yourself?" the voice of Luke Cusack said.

"It's not Maurteen," Brendan Nilan replied.

"By all that's holy, it's the Yank!" Luke Cusack cried. He came in his uncertain way to his cousin. Brendan Nilan also took a step or two to meet him.

"What has you out this hour of the night?" Luke asked.

"Just a walk."

"A walk at this hour—go away. Did they throw you out of the house?"

"No—not yet," Brendan Nilan answered, irony in his tone.

"Look here," Luke said, laying a hand on his cousin's arm, partly to steady himself, "you're a damn queer fellow and maybe a damn decent fellow. Am I right, now?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? You know a good deal. I own up to that. I'm no way spiteful, am I?"

"No—you're in very good form, I should say."

"Oh, maybe I have a drop on me. What harm is that? It's a good man's case, a damn good man's case. If you took an odd 'half-one' maybe you'd be the better of it, and Mark too."

"Maybe—maybe not."

"I tell you you would, and I know what I'm talking about. Do I or do I not? Listen, now, Nilan. What has you moving about at this hour? Tell me that, like a good fellow."

"I have told you already."

"Go on out of that. You won't take me in so easy. You're up to something. What's in the wind?"

"Nothing, so far as I know."

Luke brought his hand down in a heavy thump on his cousin's shoulder, then laughed hoarsely, swaying back from him. "I have it," he cried, "that I may be struck stiff but I have it. Faith, Nilan, you're a sly one." He dug the other with his elbow, laughing again. "Well, who would ever think of it! But come on home. You'll do no good. I'll be as far as the house with you." He linked Brendan Nilan, and after a pause

the two came back to the road together, Luke stumbling a little at intervals.

"I won't mention this to no one," Luke rambled. "You needn't be afraid of me."

"I'm not," the other replied, quietly.

"It's a rich one, right enough."

Luke broke into "rise a stave" of the Land League song again. He was in an active mood. Brendan Nilan cried out in distress.

"What's wrong with you now?"

"Stop that howling."

"Howling—who's howling?"

"You are."

Luke stood surveying the other. "Was I offensive to you? Was I, now, Nilan? Have I offended you? Answer me that?"

"You have not. Come on home, for heaven's sake."

"I will go home, and I'm well able to go home, do you hear that? And I've a good respectable home to go to, what's more. I'd have it known to you that I'm none of your beggarmen or paupers at all. I'm the son of a strong farmer, and I'm a strong farmer myself. I've a slated house and a two-storeyed house, and I'm no night marauder, but a respectable married man. Do you understand me now, Mr. Brendan Nilan, late of New York? How do I know where you come from? You might be a lift-boy in the Bowery for all anybody knows. I don't want to be offensive, and I won't be offensive, but I want you to understand me." The words came out in spasmodic jerks, between hiccoughs and nods of the head.

"You'd better get home, Luke."

"I will if I like, and if it suits me. My home is my own, and my life is my own. I'm an independent man, and I'm a respected man. Take that into your consideration now. Put it with a pinch of snuff and see would it make you sneeze, me little lath of a ladeen!"

"Good-night. I'm off."

"Hold on, now. I won't keep you a minute. Don't imagine I'm offensive, for I'm not, and never was. Do you give in to that?"

"Of course, but get home."

"Home be damned! Who cares about home? I've no right home at all, and I don't want to be wronged about it. I have no animosity to you, Nilan, none in the world. But I want to tell you this much, that I'm a wronged man, and a suffering man, only I don't want to talk about it."

"Quite right. That's the spirit."

"But you're me own cousin, and I have respect for you, and the blood that's between us is good blood and decent blood. Listen to this now. I'm crucified, and I have the rottenest house that dog or devil ever put foot in. I'm tormented, and I have no one to say a word for me. Leave it there, Nilan."

Luke Cusack had arrived at the hand-shaking stage of his maudliness. Brendan Nilan's heart sank. His hand lay limp in the hand of his cousin. He looked around at the vague trees, the faint light in the sky, the strip of white road, the dark walls that bordered it; he caught the scent of the new mown hay; heard the bleating of some sheep; his brain whirled with the thought that had held him the whole night; he felt, subconsciously, the terror and attraction of the words, "To

America!" that had been urging him on to some dazzling adventure, and now his surroundings, the reality that Luke Cusack, of all men, should hold him by the hand, gave him a consciousness that here was one of the ironic, fantastic moments of life. He was not listening to the rambling words of his cousin; he was oblivious to what he said, until something riveted his attention with a sudden stab.

"Martha is to blame. She's not what she swore she'd be at the altar to me. She's no woman for a man like me at all, and I'm heart-scalded and wronged. There is the house above now, empty and as cold as a barrack, with never a warm word, or a laugh or the sound of a child's voice about the place. What way would I be in such a place? Answer me that if you can."

"I think you had better go home."

Luke Cusack backed to the step of embankment along the wall, and sat down.

"It's easy for you to talk. No one cares a jack straw for me or what happens me. I never get a kind word or a decent thought. I'm just regarded as a clod and a clown, and no more. No one has less wish for me than my own people. God, I'm a miserable man, surely!" He covered his face with his hands, and Brendan Nilan was conscious that in the maudlin mind there broke a lucid interval, and one that gave a human touch to his cousin. He never had so much sympathy for Luke Cusack before, something striking in upon his own mind that was an accusation and a pain.

"I'm sorry for you, Luke."

"Nilan," said Luke, rising and coming to him, "I

want to tell you something. I can't keep it hidden away for ever. My wife has left me."

"Left you?"

"Yes; she's gone; Martha is gone."

"Then her mother has not been ill?"

"No; that was only an excuse to cloak it. We had words. When I got up in the morning she was gone, leaving a note behind. Do you know what? I had like to go into the river that day. I felt hell and flames and the devil around me."

"But surely she will come back?" Brendan Nilan framed the question very slowly, his voice under control, but his eyes seeking Luke in the dim light, his whole frame tense with nervousness. Luke paused, too, before he answered, and the other for a moment fancied that the question had aroused the suspicion of even the half muddled brain.

"I don't know that," Luke said. "I am waiting to see—to hear. If she's not back soon, I don't know what to say. And I never had any luck, only everything turning against me, and to be treated like dirt.

"Pull yourself together." Brendan Nilan offered the conventional advice half absentmindedly. His concern was not with Luke. What he had to say only interested him now for what enlightenment it brought to bear on his own compelling desires. The little wave of sympathy for Luke only lasted a moment, got swamped in the passion that was raging mentally within himself.

"Let them say what they like," Luke continued, "but I have my feelings as well as another. And I tell you now that I thought more of Martha than any woman that ever was since the world began."

Brendan Nilan regarded Luke Cusack with a stare that would have startled him could he have seen it—for in the stare was denial of belief, a look of combat and a challenge.

"Pull yourself together." He repeated the only words that occurred to him mechanically.

"I treasured her," Luke went on, following his own strain of thought. "She was my wife and my companion, and maybe we had our differences. But this I know—listen to me, Nilan—that if any other man left his hand on her, or touched a hair of her head, by the living God, I'd pull the entrails from out of his steaming bloody carcass."

Luke's clenched fists jerked out vaguely in the dim light, his arms turning upwards in half circle, the sinews starting up on his wrists; he sprang clean from the ground, his heels digging back into the road with a harsh grind; he breathed hard through the nostrils, and swayed close to his cousin. Brendan Nilan could catch the sudden glow in the smouldering near eyes, the pallor of a vicious half debauched face, and never was he so conscious of the primitive, ungovernable, unreasoning nature of this man who under his sulkiness had moods that were always ebbing and flowing. Never did he feel so utter a hatred for him or such a longing to set his strength against him, to throw off the cloak of pretence that galled him, make his foolish declaration, deliver his unlawful challenge. Nevertheless he was abnormally collected, cool in his calculations, alive to any rash step.

"You are in a temper, Luke," he said. "It is not good for you. We had better go home."

He moved along the road.

"Aye," Luke agreed, but with abandon still in his tone, "it's just as well for us. I'm for home, for the great house they put up on the hill for me, the pack of cut-throats and traitors."

When they came to the long, low house, silent in the night, snug looking in its dim surroundings, the night air laden with the perfume of monthly roses, Luke Cusack struck up the hill.

When Brendan Nilan crept into his room, filled with the regular breathing of Mark, and prepared to go to bed, he heard the raking voice of Luke in the distance raised in a sudden quivering chorus.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE OLD GRANDMOTHER.

"YOUNG man, I say unto thee, arise!" Brendan Nilan half opened his eyes and looked up at the speaker. Mark Cusack was bending over him, smiling.

"What, can it be morning—already?"

He yawned and stretched himself, reluctant to stir.

"I was out already," Mark said. "I met the dawn as she tripped down Slieve Gorm."

"I imagine I only closed my eyes for five minutes," Brendan Nilan declared, as he sat up.

"The meadows wait," Mark said, going out of the room whistling. Brendan Nilan looked around the familiar room. Consciousness of what had happened the day—and night—before came back to him.

"To America!" he cried, half joyously, springing from the bed.

A little later he trotted down after Mark to the meadow. There was a dew on the grass and the hedges were enshrouded in the endless spiders' webs. The family party were already at work tossing the hay in the meadow in the bright sunlight—the energetic figure of Mark, making his journey along the wave of the half-ripened grass, his method with the fork, business-like; Sheela Conneely tripping briskly after him, her young voice fresh and given to laughter, her hair tied in a little hard knot at the back of her head, her skirt tucked

over her red petticoat about her slender hips, her prominent teeth gleaming; Mrs. Cusack someway behind them, methodical, conscientious, her gait so reminiscent of his own mother; in another part of the meadow, Maurteen Conneely, his fork casting the hay in proportion to the great strokes of his long arms; his mother a little way from him, ambling along while she chattered. Their appearance had so much of pastoral activity, healthiness, optimism, primitive contentment, that he could not help contrasting it with his own mood and his own mind, more complex and more exacting, its present eruption condemning him to a condition that was a delight and at the same time a pain. He went to the meadow with some reluctance, his fork on his shoulder.

"Tackle in, old boy," Mark called out. "Don't worry about the machinery. It will arrive in its own time, and then you can lord it over us."

Brendan Nilan set himself to work. The sheer physical effort restored him to something like a normal condition at first. He worked up a jest in the tossing of the hay, observing the bright gleam in the upper layer of the grass that was already becoming crisp and seasoned, the greener streaks where the sap still lingered in the under layer, the queer medley of flattened weeds and half-decayed wild flowers, the wreaths of thin vapour that steamed from the disturbed hay, the scent of the meadow-sweet so powerful that he disliked it. Keeping a little way from Mark, he carried on a controversy with him while they worked on the merits of ensilage, holding that it was a better fodder and a better economy than hay-making. "Yesterday you wanted me to buy a hay-tosser; to-day you want to abolish hay," Mark laughed.

"That's the worst of these fellows that have more in their heads than they can find use for, Sheela."

Brendan Nilan noticed that Mark conducted the conversation so as to link Sheela up with it. Mark was practical, healthy, irritatingly fortunate even in his love-making, Brendan Nilan told himself. He would marry this young girl, they would settle down on the farm, raise a large family with the crops and live to a great age without any problem of any kind ever breaking in upon them. The routine would be as certain as anything could be, and Brendan Nilan fell to wondering if it would be better if everybody could live the life of Mark Cusack, or if they did, would it stop all human progress and merely stereotype the human race into a perfect animal type? His mind wandered into other regions, and in the end he found himself explaining rather confusedly to Mark how well the corner of a quarry on the upland would lend itself to the making of a silon for ensilage, while he was propounding mentally the reasonableness of the two divisions of the human race in Well's "Time Machine," one effete and suffering from night horrors, the others, burrowers in the ground, only coming up their dreadful shafts in obedience to a cannibal instinct. He mixed up the quarry and the construction of the silon with the shafts of the Underworld and stopped suddenly in his rambling talk because Sheela was laughing heartily at him.

"He's wool gathering, Sheela," Mark cried, "the Danes have made a kettle-of-fish of him, and the Belgians given him the gollywobbles. It will take Clonlea to hammer him into the shape of a decent Christian again."

Brendan Nilan dodged slowly away from Mark and

Sheela. He noted with some grim humour that they were quite unconscious of his detachment. He grew less and less interested in the work. It all seemed so tame, so futile, so unprogressive, so tiring to keep stirring up the same drifts of hay over and over again. It became a downright labour to him, and his pauses grew very frequent, his meditations longer as he stood leaning on the shaft of his hay fork. Once Maurteen Conneely, who came along with a hay rake, making great sweeps of the grass, had to push him out of his way. Mark also saw the incident from afar, curled his little finger, put it into his mouth and whistled shrilly. When Brendan Nilan looked towards him, Mark pointed a finger upwards. "Remember my advice," he shouted, "leave it to that fellow."

Brendan Nilan looked up at the sky. A little speck was dancing in the blue air, distinct against a white cloud that hurried across from the west. The lark was flooding space with melody, and he—hitherto so responsive to and observant of every stir of bird life—had never heard the morning pæan.

"I'm sick," he told himself, and set feverishly to shake out the monotonous hay to the bright rays of the sun. He grew more and more to hate the work, to develop a contempt for his occupation. His former zest in the work about the farm was broken. Everything seemed dwarfed, miserable, narrow, all life in the place shrunken. It was a very great relief to him when the breakfast hour arrived and they all deserted the meadow. He let the others go before him, trailing up the fields. Mark and Sheela laughing and chattering, their steps buoyant and full of energy.

The old woman had the breakfast prepared for them in the kitchen. She was hobbling about briskly, forgetting nothing, the servant of everybody, her wrinkled hands deft about the table.

"Well," she said, "this is the smallest drift of workers I ever seen coming from the meadows. We live in queer times. I remember the day when you'd see the people swarming in the fields in the harvest, moving and shifting about, activity everywhere, and hearty people they were, with good laugh, or the hearty shout, and songs nearer to their lips than sighs. Ah, well, the times change, they do indeed, and there is no use in the old people saying anything at all."

"Give us plenty to eat, gran, that's what we want," Mark said, as they seated themselves.

"Ah, that's it," the old woman declared, "the young are always asking and taking, and the old always giving and giving. Bedad, I never seen anyone putting on the shape of a woman so quick as Sheela, God bless her. You have reason to be proud of her, Nance."

"She's a very good girl, indeed," Mrs. Conneely said, thoughtfully.

The old woman laid her hand on Brendan Nilan's head as she passed him, smoothing down his hair.

"It's a great wonder, son, that Clonlea does not do better for your paleness. What will Mary say to us at all if some day she sees you white, with them blue rims under your eyes?"

"Oh, I'm all right, gran," Brendan Nilan said.

"Well, in troth you're not—take the brown cake, it's wholesome—and you look one in trouble or that would have a weight on the mind. I suppose it's them books

and all the knowledge you have. But young people should not be like that—them duck eggs are beautiful, Sara,—for it is not according to nature. Sheela there, now, has a brightness in the eye and a colour in the skin that is good to see. That I may never die until I see her with a baby on her breast—pass down the butter to Mrs. Conneely, Mark, and don't look so foolish—for what way does a young woman ever look so beautiful as when she takes her baby on her breast? Sure all the world knows that."

They were half way through the breakfast when Luke Cusack's unexpected but unmistakable footsteps sounded along the hall. He threw open the door and stood there looking at the people at their breakfast, his expression surly, his eyes half-bleared, half-bloodshot.

Brendan Nilan looked up eagerly at Luke, for he had become suddenly tense with expectancy. What had brought Luke at that hour of the morning? He seldom came near the house since the unpleasantness over the hay-saving. Had he heard anything from Martha? Had she left Ballyrea already, and had the news been conveyed to her husband? Was she already out of Ireland, on board ship, steaming to America? If so——.

He took a sudden intake of the breath as he looked up at Luke. Perhaps the moment had come when he might now act himself with promptness! Everybody at the table, except Mark, was also looking up at Luke, whose presence had caused a curious uneasiness.

"Have a cup of tea with us, Luke?" his mother asked, anxiety at the same time in her voice. Luke ignored her. His eyes rested on Mark's face.

"Them rakes," he said, and stopped.

"What about them?" Mark inquired impatiently.

"Six of them is mine," Luke said, "and I want them."

"Want them!" cried Maurteen Conneely. "Man alive, half your meadows are not yet down."

Luke scowled at Maurteen Conneely. "I'll mind my own business, and you mind yours, Maurteen," he said.

"Some of the rakes are in the meadow, some in the hay loft," Mark said.

"Well, I want to take mine out of them," Luke broke in.

"Well, take them, and be damned to them," Mark snapped.

"Now, Mark!" the old woman said, reprovingly.

"I took them already," Luke went on. "I brought them up to my own place, where they'll be wanted. I only came in to tell you, in case you'd be looking for them."

Luke walked out again. Mark muttered something under his breath. Mrs. Cusack sighed, and wiped her lips with a corner of her apron. The old woman shook her head.

"He's a bloody swine," Maurteen Conneely broke out at last.

"Maurteen, for shame!" his mother said, her gentle eyes full of pain.

"And how can I help it?" Maurteen demanded. "He took the rakes for pure spite. He won't want them for days, maybe weeks, and he knew Mark was short, because he lent some of his own to Matty Donovan. He thought he would stop us from doing our little share of

work for a time in Mark's meadows. That's no way for any man to go on; I have two minds to give him a punch in the gob. Am I right?" Maurteen Conneely suddenly turned to Brendan Nilan, who sat beside him.

Brendan Nilan appeared to require some effort to bring his mind back to the fact that the young giant had turned his tremendously live and healthy face upon him for corroboration. His delicate fingers were crumbling some breadcrumbs on the cloth.

"Yes," Brendan Nilan said, absently, "you are very crude and very vigorous, Maurteen—a raw, primitive youth, and there is something about you that I can't bear at the present moment."

Mark grinned broadly, then returned to his breakfast.

"Now you got your answer," Sheela said to her brother. "Maybe you'll hold your tongue the next time."

Soon after, they all, except Brendan Nilan, rose and left the house to resume operations in the meadow.

The old woman hobbled about the house, muttering to herself. Brendan Nilan, unnoticed for a time, remained by the table, his elbows on the table, his forehead in one of his hands, like one suffering from headache. The old woman went to the back door and stood there looking out. Brendan Nilan raised his head and looked at her, the quaint old figure framed in the door, her back not so much bent, one hand leaning on her stick. Over her right shoulder he could see the hill to the upland, and crowning the hill the house of Luke Cusack.

He was conscious that the old woman, too, was look-

ing at the house, and that it was not her first time to survey it from the spot. There was something peculiar, almost sinister in her attitude. She came over to the table after a time and sat opposite Brendan Nilan.

"Are you going back to the meadow with them, son?" she asked, but there was indifference in her voice.

"Yes, gran, after a little.

"It is not worth your while."

"Why not?"

"Because the day will be broken on them. The wind has changed again, and the clouds have thickened and lowered. It will pour out of the heavens."

"So that is what you have been speculating at the door?" Brendan Nilan said, inwardly disappointed.

The old woman paused a little before she replied.

"Not altogether," she said, her hands moving uneasily on her lap. "I was thinking of that fellow, Luke."

"Ah!"

"He is getting more bad-minded. I am sorry to say that, for I petted him as a child, and his mother has her heart stuck in him still. He's not worth it."

"He may have his faults, of course," Brendan Nilan allowed.

"Faults!" the old woman snapped. "He is what none of his people or blood ever were. He is a drunkard and a sour-tempered man, and his wife a useless bird of paradise; not even to get a child between them. I don't wonder the hand of God was against that unnatural match."

"That is not charitable, grandma."

"Charity, don't talk to me! He has great charity and

sweetness himself, hasn't he? Did you hear him about the rakes, trying to stop the little struggle work in the meadows? Nice charity, that, isn't it? I never knew one of his name to do the like of that before. Long ago I put him out of my heart."

She turned away a little, her eyes again upon the house on the hill, seen through the door. Already there were drops of rain sounding on the grass outside. She shuffled over to the door, her figure taking on that sinister attitude—the attitude of one speculating evilly—that Brendan Nilan noticed before.

"He'll drink himself to death," she said slowly. "It's in his face already, rank ugly death. Then the lady of the house, the one that always hated me, will be leaving Clonlea for ever. My blessing go with her. That she may get another husband that will be satisfied to keep her for admiration. She'll want such a one, for Luke Cusack is drinking himself to death surely, the blood turning sour and rotten in his veins from the dint of whisky. I see death marching upon the hill." She raised her stick like one pronouncing a grim prophecy, then came hobbling back to the table.

"How can you think such ugly things, grandma?"

"Because they give me pleasure."

"Pleasure? How on earth could they give you pleasure?"

"Because they will bring my dream true."

"Your dream?"

"Aye."

"Dream—of what?"

"Of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, of you, Mary's child. I have done well for Sara. She has her son Mark for this place. He is well fit for it, and he will bring Nance Conneely's daughter in here—and a good mating that will be. Sara ought to be satisfied. She will rock her grandchildren by this hearth, and what more does she want? It is not fair for her to always want everything. She wants the upland for Luke, and that fine house, and she has even boasted of that wife of Luke's—that great picture of a woman with no more sense than a crow and a great hatred of me in her very looks. I'll see her out of it yet."

"So I'm to be installed on the hill when Luke goes?" Brendan asked, a queer light in his eyes.

"Please God, son, please God. I would like to see you there, if it be that Luke drinks himself to death."

"Suppose, grandma, that I then also took over Martha—Luke's widow—married her—what would you say?"

The old woman looked at him and shook her head. "I would say nothing," she answered.

"Well, what would you think?"

"I'd think many things, and I'd have pity for you in my heart."

"But why should I be pitied?"

"Because you'd have married a widow woman and a woman, morebetoken, that you knew to be barren." The words were spoken evenly, without any viciousness, a blunt statement of a homely fact complete in its logic to the mind of the old woman herself. She was merely talking a platitude.

The rain outside began to pour, the whole sky to darken, everything pointing to one of those mercilessly

wet days that bring such hardship to the workers in fields in the West of Ireland.

"I thought so," the old woman said.

From where they sat they saw the old reapers, their coats thrown hurriedly over their heads and shoulders, make their way one by one into Luke's house on the hill. Luke himself brought up the rere. The old woman scoffed.

"They must have run at the first drop of moisture from the heavens," she said. "They are glad of the excuse. They will spend the day carousing in the house, Luke himself leading the way. A curse is on that house, I tell you."

Brendan Nilan was not paying very much attention, his look absent-minded as he watched the merciless rain making the whole landscape look miserable. A little cry from his grandmother wakened him up. He saw the plump figure of Murt Cooney stumping through the rain, making a bee-line up the hill for Luke Cusack's house.

"There is Murt Cooney," she said, her tone bitter. "He knows where to go for nourishment. No man yet ever started to drink himself to death in the countryside that Murt Cooney was not his companion to the last drink. Did you ever hear of the vultures that come miles by instinct to where a man falls, so that they might devour the flesh from his dead bones? Not one of them ever had better instinct for carcases than Murt Cooney. Look at him legging it up to Luke's house!"

"Oh, I wish you would shut up," Brendan Nilan said, with sudden resentment.

The old woman looked at him. "Can I help my feelings?" she asked.

"No—nor can I mine."

"What feeling have you in the case?"

"I don't like your talk about death and that house. I can only remember it for one thing, it has only one appeal to me."

"Indeed? What might that be?"

"It is the house where Martha has lived."

"Martha?"

"Yes. She has moved about there, suffered her martyrdom there, made it a sacred spot—to me."

He spoke with brooding fervour, not fully conscious of the manner in which the old woman regarded him, his eyes still out of the door, riveted on the house on the hill, his whole attitude tense but abstract. As if his feelings grew too much for him, he rose abruptly and walked out of the house into the rain.

The old woman sat very still by the table for a time, her wrinkled hands moving uneasily, her old face troubled. Gradually an unbelievable horror seemed to dawn upon her; she looked around the kitchen as if afraid; her lips began to mumble.

"Because Martha lived there . . . a sacred spot to me . . . and the way he said 'Martha.' . . . Luke himself, the first days, never said it softer or put more into it. . . . His own first cousin's wife . . . a child of Mary's coveting the wife of a child of Sara's . . . the Cross of Christ about us!"

She rose trembling, and hobbled hurriedly into a bedroom. She returned, her face ashen, her teeth chattering, a bottle of holy water in her hand, and sprinkled it with a quill about the place to banish the spirits.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONVENT PARLOUR.

MARTHA arrived in Ballyrea as the day was about to break. It was a long, silent journey in the night. A feeling of utter depression overtook her as she alighted from the car, paid the jarvey, and walked up the deserted street to her father's house. A half-dozen unconvincing excuses jostled each other in her mind to account for her sudden and early appearance. She stood shivering at the familiar door, sick in mind and body, too miserable to knock. She looked up at the windows of the houses opposite and about. Then she imagined them filled with peering eyes. How they would all talk of her if she was seen standing—almost crouching—at her father's door! If but one eye saw her, how the guessing and speculation and gossip would take wing! She remembered herself as a girl; she loved to rile them all with little defiances of the conventions; how she enjoyed shocking very proper persons; how she vexed them with stray acts of independence; angered them by impulsive onslaughts on local traditions. She wished vaguely that some of that fine defiance would now come to her assistance. But only a dull sense of wrong, of outrage, possessed and left her a coward. A footstep somewhere on the road startled her so much that she walked away from the door, turned round a corner, and hurried along until she got clear of the town. Half unconsciously she took the road that led by the lake,

grey and cold in the morning light, the wind chilly that came from it. She sat on a wooden bench observing the wild birds skimming over the water, making rapid flights in their quest for the morning meal. A car rattling along the road frightened her out of the place, and she climbed over a stone wall, taking to the fields. A familiar walk, bringing back stray memories of girlish rambles, of days spent in the sunshine, brought her to another strip of the lake, a place fringed with a great clump of bullrushes. Out of this place immense flocks of starlings were rising, their wings making a boom overhead, thousands of them circling over the place, screaming and marshalling, before they formed into little flocks, breaking away east and west to scour the land for food. Martha sat on a rock, feeling a certain companionship, even a heartening, in all this riot of bird life, in the freedom and adventure of the dark winged creatures of the air. She remembered, with a flicker of a smile, an occasion, in a late autumn long ago, how she had stood on this spot watching the flocks of starlings coming from all quarters out of the twilight to pass the night in the rushes. Some boys threw stones into the rushes, and the birds were so many in the place that they could scarcely escape. She remembered how she had protested, stood up to a bully of a boy, and when no other means were effective, scratched him about the face. All these boys and girls, companions, were now even more scattered, gone on even longer flights than the birds winging away over her head. She wandered about the place, her steps slow, her figure ghostly in the lonely place, her spirit uneasy, trying to baffle present fears by working up melancholy but fleeting interests

in familiar little things. Some voices attracted her attention, and she saw a small group of people walking down the fields on the higher ground, baskets and cans in their hands. They were mushroom pickers returning from an early morning tramp. When they had gone by, she returned slowly to the town, dodging the few half sleepy people she met on the way. Aggie was taking down the shutters of the shop when she arrived at the house. There were curling pins in her red hair and sleep in her half-opened eyes. When she realised that it was Martha who came up to her, one of the shutters slipped from her hands, making a great bang on the flags.

"Lord, Miss Martha, you gave me a turn!" Aggie said.

Martha felt mistress of herself at the sound of Aggie's voice.

"Don't make hash of the shutters," Martha said.

"But you look so——" Aggie said, staring.

"Look so what?"

"So cold."

"And I should think I am. So would you be if you had driven from Clonlea. Is mother up?"

"No, Miss, not yet."

"Well, I won't disturb her. I'm cold as a stone, and I'm going to bed for a few hours. Tell them I came, and waken me later."

"I will, Miss."

"I only came to make some purchases and do some business in the town. Tell them that."

"I will, Miss."

Martha walked quietly into the house, crept to the

room always sacred to her, undressed, and slipped into bed. She sighed as she covered up her head, trying to imagine that she was once more back to the days when she lay there, and that Clonlea, the new house on the hill, her life there, were all a nightmare. She buried her face in the pillow like a wounded animal that had crept back to its den.

For the day that followed Martha was in one of those lively moods that Aggie loved. She rattled about the kitchen, laughed, mimicked people, told snatches of quaintly humorous stories, and even danced some fantastic steps on the earthen floor. To her mother she explained that she had come on some business mission having to do with hay-forks urgently required in Clonlea. They were all so busy there that they could not spare a horse to drive her and she was forced to utilise the mail car. Next morning she had, she said, a woful headache and would rest for a while. She made some pretence of writing a letter to Clonlea to explain her absence. Three days dragged slowly by, and Aggie confided to Mrs. Lee that Martha's headache must be very bad, because she had come on her unawares with her hair down, her head on the bed, crying.

That evening Martha made her way to the convent, asked for Sister Patrick, and was shown into a parlour with a waxed floor, a statue under a glass shade on a mahogany table, a severity and ascetic air about the place that gave an atmosphere of quiet and holy seclusion. Presently Sister Patrick, quick, almost gushing, hurried into the room, kissed Martha on the cheeks and sat beside her.

"You are not a bit changed, Martha."

"No," Martha said, uneasily.

"And I hope your husband is very well."

"Yes—he's—well."

"And your father and mother?"

"Very well, too."

"It is so nice to see you. I thought you had forgotten me. And you write so seldom lately."

"I was very busy," Martha said, speaking mechanically.

She was conscious that Sister Patrick looked more shrewd than ever. Her eyes seemed to search Martha while she talked polite commonplaces. Her air was businesslike, with a touch of condescension that seemed to come from practice. She sat leaning a little to one side in the chair, toying with the beads, her face alert in its frame of stiff white linen.

"I know you are very happy in your new home," Sister Patrick said.

Martha murmured "Of course," and smiled.

"You were so very fortunate after all," Sister Patrick allowed. "When one thinks how hard it is to get on in the world, especially for girls. There are so few opportunities."

"That is true."

"And of course you married into such a respectable family.—And a prosperous family," Sister Patrick added, laying stress on the point. It was as much as to say, "That is the great thing."

Martha paused, her eyes glowing—almost sullen in their sudden change of expression. Sister Patrick hitched a little uneasily in her chair as a half-forgotten danger signal came back to her memory.

"Yes," Martha said, with an old, dull bitterness, "I made a devil of a hit."

Sister Patrick hitched up straight in her chair, her stiff coif sticking out under her chin like the breast of a turkey cock suddenly angered.

"Martha!" she exclaimed, putting a finger over her lips. It was a touch of shocked reproof that Martha remembered in school. Then Sister Patrick looked round the room, afraid that anyone—anything—might have heard. Her lids dropped over her eyes as she glanced at a prie-dieu in the corner.

"I came to speak to you, Ellen, in the old way," Martha said, with something of an apology.

"Yes; but, my dear, it was so unexpected—so improper—that word. I really don't know what to think." Sister Patrick hitched her coif into place, her face severe and cold.

"It was out before I had time to think," Martha said. "And you were irritating me, Ellen."

"Sister Patrick, please. I am no longer Ellen."

"Oh, yes, you are—to me. It is Ellen—the old Ellen—I came to see—not Sister Patrick."

Sister Patrick allowed herself a conventional smile of toleration. "Well, no matter. Let our talk not be unpleasant."

"It cannot be pleasant," Martha said.

"But——"

Martha interrupted Sister Patrick. She leaned across and caught her by the hands, looking into her face.

"Ellen, you must listen to me. I am perfectly miserable, and I will go mad if I don't talk to somebody. I can't go on the way I am any longer. You are the only

one who can listen to me, whom I can trust. I know you better than you think. That nun's manner does not take me in in the least. It only irritated me. Your heart is just the same as it always was. I can't talk to you as if you were half way up to heaven, and I was half way down to——"

"Martha!"

"All right. I won't mention it. I will be quite respectable, as proper as anyone ever married into nice people and such a prosperous family. Well, I'm not happy all the same."

"Not happy?"

"No," Martha said back, the dull, rebellious light in her eyes.

"Martha, I'm so sorry."

There was genuine pain in Sister Patrick's voice. She looked more like the Ellen Noonan of old. The expression of motherliness crept into her face, and her brisk, conventional manner dissolved at the first touch of her inherent good nature.

"What has happened?" she asked, at length, her eyes softening. "I thought you were happy, and I always prayed for you, Martha."

"My husband and I," Martha said, "have not been good friends. We were not—temperamentally—suited to each other."

Sister Patrick sighed.

"Of course, I thought——" she began.

"I know what you thought," Martha interrupted quickly, "but, for heaven's sake, don't crush me by saying 'I told you so.'"

Sister Patrick leaned across this time, taking Martha's hands.

"Why should I, above all others, wish to hurt you, Martha? You know I would not."

"I do, Ellen. But the truth is I have fallen out with Luke. He has not treated me well."

"Then he has been unkind?"

"Yes," Martha said, looking out of the window, her eyes ranging over the well-kept lawn, the trim walks, the bright flower beds.

Sister Patrick watched her keenly, guessing much of the tragedy that Martha left untold.

"I have run away from my home," Martha said, in the same low, deliberate way. Sister Patrick grew more stolid, the hardness about the mouth accentuated.

"That is a terrible thing, Martha. After all, your home should be as sacred to you as this convent is to me." Sister Patrick looked around the polished, well-kept, ascetic reception room.

"I have had no companionship, no friends, no interests for a long time, I might as well have been in Siberia."

"Martha, you know you were always extreme in your views, prone to exaggerate. I must remember that." Sister Patrick was putting up guards about herself.

Martha looked at Sister Patrick, a smile that was half sardonic on her face.

"My husband drinks," she said.

"That is terrible. Why not——"

"Get him to take the pledge," Martha interrupted, with a little laugh.

"Well—perhaps—that, too."

"Even if he were sober, I have no home, no interests."

"But you have his friends."

"They are no help to me. At first they were. The grandmother is like an old ogre in their house. She never liked me, and I grew to hate her. Luke's mother is a good woman whose mind never rises beyond the byre. Then there is Mark, a vigorous farmer, to me a sod of clay, baked hard as a brick. There is the American, who used to be amusing, and is now a farmer, and he is clay too—wet clay."

"But you have——"

"I have no children, that is against me, too. My husband hates me for that."

Sister Patrick closed her eyes for a little, her lips moving.

"That is right, Ellen, pray for me," Martha said. Sister Patrick opened her eyes, regarding Martha with a touch of fear in her gaze.

"And now," Martha said, "I'm going away."

"Going away?"

"Yes, to America, or somewhere.

"Then, Martha, you are——" Sister Patrick paused.

"Lost," Martha finished for her.

"Have you told your mother?"

"No; I won't let her know until I have gone. I want to get some money from father, what will get me away. I have to invent some excuse to get the money."

Sister Patrick sighed. "It is a terrible position," she said.

"A hopeless position," Martha added.

"No—not hopeless," Sister Patrick said, slowly. "I

am sure you have suffered, Martha. I can see it in your face now."

"You cannot see it, and you cannot understand it, Ellen. What I have told you conveys nothing—it is only the outside, the mask. The rest is locked away, even from you."

"One thing is certain," Sister Patrick said, "you must not go away."

"Must not go away! Why not?"

"Because, for one thing, it would be a cowardly thing to do."

"That is only a mock heroic, Ellen. It comes mighty easy for you to say it. What can you know about the things I have lived through?"

"As much as you know about the things I have lived through here. Do you think I have had no struggle, no troubles, no revolts? My way has been no more a path of roses than your way. But I chose my way and you chose yours. When one takes the shilling, one has got to do the soldiering."

"I could struggle with tangible things," Martha said, "but I can't fight shadows."

"Shadows?"

"Yes—a house of shadows, a place of shadows, a landscape of shadows, hills that have only echoes."

Sister Patrick looked curiously at Martha. "I wonder, Martha," she said, "if you are a subject for a doctor?"

"What do you mean?"

"Your nerves are gone wrong. That is what may be the matter."

Martha laughed. "What an amateur of life you are,

Ellen! You have been locked up here all your life, with no personal responsibilities, nothing to ruffle you, always meeting agreeable people, none of the ugly things of life to touch you, no knowledge of what men and women are in the struggle outside—all you have to come up to is a routine."

"Are you sure of all that?"

"Of course, I am."

"Well, I have not been shut up, as you call it, all the time here. I have, for one thing, spent nearly a year in another place."

"Where?"

"The Union hospital. Among men and women who suffered, who fell in the struggle, and who had deeper scars than you have."

"Then you were nursing?"

"Yes. Did you ever see a man with cancer?"

"No."

"Last month I nursed one with cancer. They were all afraid of him. In the end even the doctor could not go to him. He could not stand the stench. Well, I went to him every day, took the bandages off and washed the wound. There were no shadows or echoes about that business, I can tell you. That was reality, life at its ugliest, disease in its most repulsive form. I had no pleasure in doing it, dear knows. It would have been more pleasant to have run away, to have given way to the revolt that laid me prostrate when the thing was done. But I had taken the shilling and I did the soldiering."

Martha gazed at Ellen—fascinated, surprised. The lines of the plain face were still hard, but Martha was

conscious of character in the high cheek bones, the hard mouth, the thick nose, the bright, small eyes set far apart. It was women with faces like this, she told herself—and not the idealistic faces with infantile perfect complexions of the holy picture—who had given their blood—"done the soldiering," as Ellen called it—in martyrdom.

Martha felt abashed, but did not like to acknowledge it.

"I'm sorry if I misjudged you," she said, in a subdued tone.

Sister Patrick laughed and hitched her coif with both hands into place. She was mistress of herself again, back to the little mannerisms of sisterhood.

"I have no patience with moral cowards," she said, looking straight at Martha.

"I don't think I am a moral coward," Martha retorted, colouring.

"I don't believe you are," Sister Patrick added. "You are, perhaps, just a little run-down, suffering from depression as the result of nervous trouble.

Martha laughed, her sense of humour proving too much for her.

"You speak like one quoting a patent medicine advertisement," she said.

The notes of a quick, impatient bell sounded over the convent. Sister Patrick pricked up her ears at the sound of it, concern in her expression.

"I have kept you too long, Ellen," Martha said, "but I felt I should speak out to somebody."

"I am glad you came to me, Martha." Sister Patrick stood up to bring the interview to a close.

"I'm sorry I can't do the soldiering, Ellen," Martha

said, her voice uncertain, her expression a little miserable as she also rose.

Sister Patrick only smiled.

"There is more than soldiering in question," she said. "I did not like to carry the discussion any further than that material outlook."

"You mean——" Martha asked, hesitantly.

"We won't say any more, dear," Sister Patrick said to Martha.

She stood before her girl companion of old, looking keenly and with sympathy into her eyes. She took Martha's face in her hands. "Martha," she said, "you are not now as beautiful as you used to be. But to me——"

She kissed her on the lips.

Martha, starved of heart, a runaway, proud, suffering, too unstrung to be resolute in her new and desperate enterprise, could keep back the tears no longer. They coursed down her cheeks. Sister Patrick led her to the door.

"Now," she said, "we will slip up to the chapel."

"The chapel?" Martha said, trying to stifle her emotion.

"Yes, dear. Just for a little while. We will kneel together. You can cry quietly there, and your tears will be a prayer. I shall recite——." Sister Patrick put out her hand for the knob of the door.

Martha's love of twisting other people's words into a bitter humour overcame her emotion.

"You will recite the 'De Profundis,'" she said.

"No," Sister Patrick said, confidently and calmly, as she opened the door, "I shall recite 'Te Deum.'"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAMP OF DESTINY.

When Brendan Nilan left the house in the rain he met the others on their way from the meadow, their spirits drooping and their clothes already dripping. Not that they minded getting wet very much. Rain had no terror for these people, but they could not go on with the hay-making in such weather. They would do more harm than good. Mark looked sceptically at all points of the compass. The whole world had become suddenly leaden.

"Not much hope of it breaking," he said.

"I think not," Brendan Nilan agreed, indifferently.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Mark suggested.

"Well?"

"We'll put on leggings and overcoats, take a gun and go up the hills. I heard the ducks passing last night. They were making for Loch Ard. We'll get some shots there."

Without waiting for an answer, he went into the house, his strides eager.

Brendan Nilan moved uneasily about. Mark returned, his leggings and great coat on, a fowling piece under his arm.

"Are you not ready? Look alive, man. Get a hustle on you; this American habit of browsing about will never do in Clonlea."

"I won't go, Mark. I'm not in the mood for it."

"What is wrong with you? Are you ill?"

Mark stood before him, observing him critically, a look of affection and concern hidden in his half-quizzical gaze.

"No—I'm not ill—just out of sorts—glad-to-be-left-alone sort of feeling over me."

"I don't like that," Mark said.

"Mark," Brendan answered in quick, clear accents: "You have too much thought for me, given me too much toleration, and I have liked you too well. It would have been better for me if we had fallen out at the beginning, and I had gone right back to New York."

"I know it," Mark said, jerking the gun under his arm, "you are becoming broody as an old hen. What is that one of the poets you brought says?—'And melancholy marked him for her own.' You're not going to turn out a regular scourge and blighter, are you?"

Brendan Nilan smiled.

"Go on, Mark; have your shoot. I'm no company for you to-day."

"Do you know what will happen to you if this mood continues?"

"No."

"Well, I don't like to say it. It's a horrible twist for any poor devil to get. After all, you are my cousin. I don't like to see you land into that condition, hopeless and terrible, out of which there is no redemption."

"What is this terrible thing that is to happen to me?"

"I have only the heart to mention it, because you may be warned in time. I have regard for you; blood is thicker than water. But, God help us, I see as plain

as a pikestaff that if you don't pull yourself together, take more exercise, brighten up your mind, and make yourself natural and balanced, there is nothing else for you to do except to take to writing poetry. After that it's '*beannacht leat*' to Brendan Nilan, the man that came to Ireland to be a spalpeen, and died in all the vigour and promise of his youth, having fallen and broken his neck while mooching up the slippery slopes of the Hill of Parnassus."

"Your humour is too elaborate, Mark, too many wrappings around the little central half-starved idea. Let us hope you will be quicker and keener when the duck take to the wing from the turbulent waters of Loch Ard by Clonlea."

Mark showed his small white teeth as he swung round in the rain and went off at the double in the direction of the hills.

Brendan Nilan continued wandering about in the rain. Unconsciously he found himself standing about places that had some little memory linking them with Martha. At the end of the garden he said, "It was here she stood the day we gathered the daffodils—exactly here. No, it was a little way back, nearer to that apple tree. Let me remember. How absurd it is of me to forget!" He went up the hill to trace her movements around the house, smiling to himself as little trifling incidents came back to his mind, shaking rain from his clothes now and again. From Luke Cusack's house he heard voices coming, some laughs, Luke's cranky tones breaking in on the half screams of old men who had evidently got into a hot discussion. While he wandered about, a man carrying two large jars passed in, and Brendan Nilan recognised

him as a "yardman" from Loftus Lynch's establishment.

"Imagine Martha in such a house!" he said to himself. "It is outrageous, has always been outrageous. She will never come back. I shall soon hear definitely—to-day or to-morrow—that she has left the country—and then——"

He took a little run down the hill in the rain as the only expression of his feelings. His feet slopped in the wet ground. "To America!" he cried, and skipped like a boy who had become overjoyed at some sudden delight.

As he ran he saw a figure, at first indistinct, coming up from the road. The figure was holding an umbrella straight against the pelting rain. A car rattled along the road down the valley. A movement in the figure partly seen under the umbrella caused him to pull up suddenly, his face tense in its expression. He walked over and leaned on a stone wall, his eyes still upon the figure. In another moment his first fears were confirmed. It was Martha making her way back to the house!

"Good God, Good God!" he murmured under his breath. "Can it be possible? How can she come back to that house—to that swine?"

Martha, he observed, walked slowly. There was nothing eager in her steps. Her battle up the hill did not, somehow, seem wholly against the rain. He had an impulse to run to her, intercept her, declare himself, force her to turn back, and to turn with her himself, taking all the consequences. If he had any feeling that Martha would consent, he would have obeyed the impulse. But the fact that she was making her way back to the house on the hill, however reluctantly, and doing it, too, of

her own free will, held him rooted to the spot. He felt sick and utterly miserable at this sudden smash to all the mad dazzling adventures, the giving way to a long pent up passion that had swept him for so many hours. The whole place seemed to shrivel up as he watched Martha's figure pass into the house on the hill. His eyes remained on the door for a long time. Nothing happened so far as he could learn. There was not a sound about the place except the gentle beating of the rain on the grass. Then out the door, one by one, came the old men, making their way down to the road. Last of all came Murt Cooney, stumping away with reluctance, his rosy face beaming in the rain. The return of Martha had broken up the house party.

"She has come back to him. They are now alone in the house," Brendan Nilan told himself and walked rapidly away. He went into the house unobserved and sat in his bedroom, given up to the thoughts that were raking his mind.

"I cannot continue as I was," he concluded. "The whole thing is impossible. Discipline, self-control has got me through so far. I am no longer self-controlled. I must clear out. I must get back to America."

He sat looking round the room, his mind going rapidly over the years he had spent in Clonlea. Mark would be sorry for him, would miss him in his work, especially in the little social campaigns they conducted. His object cry was still "To America!" but the adventure no longer had its old meaning. All the magic had dropped out of the words. He would doubtless meet his old companions in New York and try to revive the old interests. "I will forget all this business in Ireland," he told him-

self. But all the time he knew that he could not resume the old life exactly where he had dropped it. He had not disciplined himself into the life of Clonlea, broken down the barriers of social interventions, pulled up the rural conservations of the place, for nothing. And Martha! He could not deceive himself any longer about that matter. The scar would be there for ever. Already he was beginning to think of her as one who had proved recreant at the critical hour. He would no longer bear to meet her on the old conditions, enjoy her company under false pretences as he had done, always hugging the thought that some day he would approach her without reserve, and in some hope that she would turn to him. For he had always the conceit that Martha secretly knew and understood his attitude and that she played up to it. Now that could no longer be their relationship. There was nothing for him to do except clear out as soon as possible. On the impulse of the moment he pulled out a trunk and began to pack it feverishly with his belongings. As he did so he heard Luke Cusack's voice at the back of the house. He went to the window and threw it open. He heard Luke speaking to his mother.

"She got drenched on the road coming back," he was saying, "but she's back anyhow. I'm going down the road, for our day is broke at the hay."

Luke's steps sounded on the road, and Brendan Nilan guessed that he was heading for Loftus Lynch's bar, where he would celebrate Martha's return. Any little event out of the ordinary routine of life was excuse enough for Luke to go on a fresh burst, with a feeling of exquisite justification.

Brendan Nilan stood looking up at the house on the

hill, a new fascination in it for him. After a time he was conscious of his own absurdity.

"No," he admitted, walking about, feeling utterly wretched, his clothes wet and uncomfortable, "I can't spend my whole life gazing moonstruck up at that house —that fantastic house. It's absurd, silly. I've simply got to do something that will cut me off from the view of it irrevocably.

He pushed the half-filled trunk into a corner and put on his cap again, another impulse seizing him.

"She's alone in the house," he said. "By God, I must see her, speak to her."

He strode out of the house and straight up the hill, the rain beating a face that was grim in its resolution.

TWENTY-SEVENTH AND LAST CHAPTER.

WET CLAY.

When Brendan Nilan walked into the kitchen of the house on the hill, Martha was washing delph in a basin, her profile distinct against the light of a window. He imagined that she gave some slight hitch of surprise when she turned her face to him, but, if she did, she recovered her composure at once.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Certainly, Brendan, come in, I'm glad to see you; I have only just got back from Ballyrea."

Now the question was not one that Brendan Nilan intended to put. He had resolved coming up the hill to plunge into the real subject of his visit without any beating about the bush. But the composure of Martha, her homely occupation, her air of living in her natural environment, disarmed him. Her answer made the atmosphere additionally commonplace. He sat down by the fire rather awkwardly.

"Your mother has been unwell, I believe?" he said.

"Yes, indeed," Martha murmured, going on with her work.

"I hope she is better?"

"She is better—that is, out of danger. We were very anxious for some days."

He knew she was lying. The knowledge did not place him at so great a disadvantage as he at first experienced. He had a feeling that if Martha were only

keeping up a pretence in one matter, she was likely keeping it up in others. Perhaps she was not quite so indifferent to his visit, or quite so much at home in the house, as she wished to convey. The suspicion encouraged him. He paused for a little, then took a plunge.

"Martha, why have you come back?" He paused a little as he spoke. There was even a little passion in the ring of his voice.

Martha laid a cup down carefully on the table and looked at him.

"Why have I come back?" she repeated. "I have come back because this happens to be my home."

"I don't think that is the reason. Why did you go away?"

"Well!" Martha exclaimed, and shrugged her shoulders. It was an indication of her expressing some surprise at his right to question her.

"Your mother was not ill. I know that."

Martha wiped her hands carefully in the tea towel.

"I think we had better understand each other," she said. Her tone had changed. She came over to the fire and stood at the other side by the hearth looking down at him. His eyes devoured her movements, her figure, her face, his whole attitude and expression frankly and openly one of whole-hearted admiration and desire.

"Yes," he said, "it's better that we should understand each other."

Martha stood perfectly still, her hands clasped behind her back, and her attitude, the poise of her head, gave him that sense of good breeding which was not the least of her charms.

"I came back," she said, "because I've got to do the soldiering."

There was an undercurrent of bitterness in the deliberate words. But they only puzzled Brendan Nilan.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Ive come back to my home and husband, because my duty lies here."

The statement of the homily—the platitude—was like the cut of a whip across the face to Brendan Nilan. He rose from his chair and stood facing Martha. He had an inherent repugnance to scenes or to anything that savoured of the melodramatic. He knew that in this Martha had feelings in common with him—the only difference being that such things provoked his hatred and stirred up her peculiar sense of humour.

"Martha, I know you have quarrelled with Luke. I know that you fled from him to your people in Ballyrea. I know that you have had a miserable life here, and I know that Luke is brutalised beyond hope of recovery."

"But why do you tell me these pleasant things?"

"Because they concern me personally."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and deeply. I have been hoping—building up plans—for days past, because I thought you had left here for ever."

"I am still not able to understand."

"Oh, Martha, don't make any more pretence. I want to be perfectly frank with you, and I think it is better that you should be frank with me. I made all these speculations because I was convinced you would go away to America. I made up my mind to follow you there."

"To follow me there?"

"Yes. I can't fight and I won't fight against this thing any longer."

He paused for a moment, caught his breath, and then launched forth into a torrent of words. Martha made no move as he bared his secret soul to her, his obsession for her, the struggle he had made to break himself off from an infatuation that he knew to be fatal; he spoke bitterly and passionately of what he believed to be her own degradation, the criminal waste of her charms and her talents, the misery and narrowness of her life, he poured scorn on what he described as the hollow symbols of the marriage tie, pleaded that Luke Cusack had violated the whole ceremonial compact, and that in the sight of all rational human beings he had torn to fragments whatever chains once linked them, leaving her free to live her own life in her own way. Behind all the arguments and all the words, Martha was conscious of a personality passionately sincere, everything that he said coming from conviction, deep-rooted in his mind, and nothing put forward for the mere sake of gaining his own ends. But everything he said struck out straight at the principles of the religion, moral codes and social laws of the life in which she had been brought up. It was one civilisation contending with another. It was the cry of reason as it appeared to one, tearing at the tabernacle of sacred traditions of the other. What was justification to one understanding was damnation to the other. What was reduced to superstition in one mind held a divine and an eternal command in the mind of the other. In a subconscious way they were both aware of these clashing elements at the back of the human

struggle. When Brendan Nilan ceased speaking, they looked into each other's eyes.

The woman's intuition was even quicker than the promptings of the man's passion. She knew that in a sexual sense she had more control over herself than he had. For she saw before her a young man who had disciplined himself, hardened himself in the harsh life of the place, put up a long battle to break himself from the spell of her beauty, and who had now suddenly raised the sluices and was being swept onward in the flood of his emotion. Besides, he had no fascination for her; she was strangely moved at his words, her inherent womanly vanity was touched at the completeness of her conquest of this unusual lover, but beyond that she had no personal feeling, no sense of being drawn to him, no passion to measure that which was seeking to envelop her. The fear, too, that the strength of his character might betray her into some indiscretion made her wary. Her waywardness, so easily swayed when pitted against an effective will power, as was always the case when she had sought battle with Ellen Noonan, warned her not to risk anything. It flashed across her mind that if she had been put to this ordeal some days ago, and if all this strange love had welled up about her while she was in the throes of her despair and only able to seek relief by revolt, then surely she would have been engulfed. She was master of herself enough to reason that in that event she would also have brought Brendan Nilan down with her. There was a little flicker of satisfaction in the thought that she was strong enough to save him if he had no desire to do it himself. She had come back to do the soldiering, and she would do it. She smiled

faintly as he pleaded with her to fly the place with him, to seek a newer, fuller, more complete life in a wider environment. He made no protestations that he would be faithful to her; they were superfluous. Slowly but surely the conviction was breaking in upon him that he was making no impression on Martha. She never spoke during all this time, but in her attitude, her expression, above all, her eyes, he saw his own failure with a sickening sense of impotency. He stopped pleading and stood looking at her, awaiting the verdict, an expression of misery stealing over his face.

"Dear boy," Martha said, in a low voice at last, but it was one of motherly commiseration rather than one of encouragement. It stung him, stirred another fever in his blood. Martha was not prepared for the sudden change. But before she had time to do anything, he had sprung at her and had taken her in his arms. She struggled in his grasp.

"Let me go, you are mad, don't be a fool." There was terror in her voice.

He made no reply. His breathing was hard, and his arms had a grip that she was physically unable to match.

"You are a coward," she said, her voice broken with the sense of outrage which had given place to her terror. Still he made no reply, and they swayed back from the hearth. His face was seeking hers. She struck out at him, her eyes blazing, and he allowed the blows to rain on his face as if they were caresses. Closer and closer he drew her body to him, and at last she ceased striking out and lay passive in his arms. Her head fell a little over his shoulder and he kissed her full on the lips, long,

passionate, insane kisses, kisses that wakened no more responsive passion than if they had been soliciting the lips of a graven image. With a sudden moan of pain he pushed her away from him. She steadied herself by grasping the back of a chair. Her hair was dishevelled, her eyes dazed, her body quivering. He watched her with a dull look of despair, regarding her as if she were standing beyond some gulf he could never again hope to bridge.

"Now you may go," she said, her voice harsh.

"Yes, I am going," he said.

"Not from this house alone," she said, her words ringing with command.

"I know," he said, his voice dull, his words mechanical. "To-night I will leave Clonlea. . . . Oh, Martha, Martha!"

There was pain and despair in the cry. She saw the movement of his arms seeking her again. Her instinct told her that his passion was sweeping him on to a violence that neither she nor he could control. A cold sweat broke out on her forehead, she trembled from head to foot.

"Martha!"

The cry was short and sharp, had no pain and no despair in it this time. It was the voice of a man who would jump through the mouth of hell to the conquest of a woman like Martha Cusack.

Quick as a flash, Martha lifted the chair her hand rested on, and with sudden strength, hurled it at his head. He had time to break the impact with his arms, he staggered back a pace, and the chair fell with a crash to the ground. But, under cover of that attack, Martha

had made good her escape. He heard the slam of a door, heard the click of a key in a lock. He looked half dazed about the empty kitchen.

"Great Christ!—What have I done?"

Then he groped like a half blind man to the porch door, and stood there blinking in a swift shaft of light that was bursting from the breaking clouds.

He went down the hill rapidly, paused at the house near the road a little confusedly, and then passed into the garden, where he paced up and down the path, his movements agitated.

From the back of the house on the hill the figure of Luke Cusack came slouching; he stood looking over the boundary wall, marking the figure of Brendan Nilan making its way to the road. He climbed over the wall and tracked him down the hill, his gait a half trot, his eyes glowing, his nostrils snorting like the sniffs of a sleuth hound.

On the road he was met by Dominick, who was carrying a gun in his hand to the house.

"Where are you going with that?" Luke Cusack asked, stopping.

"Bringing it home for Mark. He was up at Loch Ard for a few shots. He brought down a lovely mallard and he went into Sheela Conneely with it."

"Give it to me. I will take it in."

Dominick handed the gun over to Luke Cusack, who went in the little garden gate in front of the house, going up the sanded walk, but, instead of going in the door, he wheeled around to the right and made his way to the garden.

Brendan Nilan rounded a corner of the garden path, his

hands behind his back, his head bent, his eyes on the ground. A sudden command made him look up, then stand still. Twenty yards away, Luke Cusack stood waiting for him. The barrel of the gun was pointing flush at his face. Luke did not hold the gun to his shoulder, his eye trained along the barrel, in the usual fashion. The stock of the gun was against his shoulder, but the aim was taken with the head thrown up. It was the attitude of one who was not alone an expert shot, but so professional that he could indulge in tricks.

"Stop!" Luke said, his voice hoarse.

Brendan Nilan was startled for a moment, then became perfectly collected.

"Put down that gun," he said. As he spoke, pronouncing the words with decision, all his faculties became alive to the mortal danger confronting him. He was so keen to take in all details that he observed that Luke's first finger did not rest on the trigger; it was moving on the rim of metal looped about the trigger. Observant of this fact, he took two deliberate steps forward. Luke's command sounded again, and his finger slipped from the rim to the trigger.

Brendan Nilan stood at once.

"You are not dealing with a woman now," Luke said. His face was livid as he spoke.

Brendan Nilan knew instinctively that Luke had either overheard or was informed of his overtures to Martha. He could not resist a leer of contempt as he regarded his cousin. He had no fear whatever of him.

"You know you are a skunk, a seducer of men's wives, and I want you to know—to feel it—that I came to blow your soul into the fires of hell."

"Put down that gun."

"Yes, when the gun has first put you down. I would shoot you dead on the red hot minute, but I want you to know your end has come, and I want you to know what I think of you. Go down on your knees like a dog. Go down before me."

Brendan Nilan indulged in a short mocking laugh, throwing back his head.

"How brave you are!" he cried.

With a snort, Luke Cusack's head dropped to the level of the barrel, and he hugged the gun to his shoulder to take aim. Brendan Nilan stood motionless, his lips a little parted in a smile of defiance, his teeth gleaming. At the same moment a body shot from the garden wall, striking up the barrel of the gun, then gripping it in a powerful grasp. It was Dominick who had intervened.

Luke's face grew livid as he beheld the lad, for a moment too surprised to say or do anything.

"It's the bastard!" he shouted, sudden fury possessing him. He struck at the youngster with all his might, and, as he caught him with a blow on the face, Brendan Nilan sprang to his aid. Dominick ran up the garden path and broke down the road like one possessed, shouting as he went for Mark.

By a natural instinct, both Brendan Nilan and Luke Cusack grasped the gun. Luke Cusack laughed at the idea of the frail-looking cousin setting his strength against his own. He felt he had the upper hand. He jerked the gun to throw the other off. Brendan Nilan let his body go with the jerk, but his grip was quite unloosened. It slowly broke in upon Luke Cusack that the American was nimble, tricky, and possibly clever

from his training in the gymnasium schools in New York. He tried a double wrench, then suddenly rushed the other backwards, hammering him with the flat of the gun on the chest, the barrel pointing skyward. The other seemed to expect all these moves and they had no effect whatever on him. He held on to the gun. Luke Cusack was beginning to breathe hard from his exertions; his late habits of life did not help him in this encounter. His expression was one of blind fury as he bent his narrow eyes on the face of his cousin. His vicious hatred, now amounting almost to an intoxication, caused the eyes to roll in their sockets. Fear of surrendering possession of the gun alone kept him from striking at the face of the other. Once or twice he tried to kick, but he was too close to the other to do any damage, and Brendan Nilan nullified their effect by clinging quite close to him. With a hiss that expressed completely insane hatred, Luke Cusack, when he could do nothing else, spat into the face of his cousin. He had no sooner done so than a quick blow struck him above the eye. It stunned him for a moment; then, recovering himself, he realised that the other was quick enough to release one hand and strike while he held on to the gun with the other. It was a thing that he knew could only be done by one who had at some time or other mastered something of the art of boxing. Then he remembered how once, in the haggard, Brendan Nilan had demonstrated to a group of young fellows the power of various ju-jitsu grips. A horror that he would be rendered powerless by one of these grips, and perhaps cheated out of his revenge, possessed Luke Cusack. It also made him careful to

keep the other from him at arm's length while the struggle for possession of the gun went on.

Meantime, Mark Cusack had come running up the road, having heard some breathless account from Dominick of what had taken place in the garden. Dominick was before him, squeezing his way into the garden through the hedge. When Mark reached the garden gate, he looked in to see what was transpiring.

He caught sight of his brother and his cousin in handgrips, bending and swaying, wheeling about in sharp jerks, engaged in a deadly struggle for the gun. They were directly behind a low hedge, so that he could only see them from the waist upward. He heard their sharp, passionate breaths and the muffled thud of their moving feet in the soft earth. The barrel of the gun swayed between them like the mast of a boat in a troubled sea.

As he paused, too amazed to move for some seconds, the strugglers lunged, staggered, half fell to the ground and recovered themselves. At the same moment there was a report, the flash of a shot. It paralysed Mark with terror. He saw the two men stagger away from each other. Luke recovered himself, his figure crouching, his under jaw hanging as he watched the other. There was a half cry, half moan, Brendan Nilan spun round once or twice, then sank below the line of the hedge. Mark waited, his heart in his mouth, to see if that figure would again rise. There was no sound whatever. Then Luke's croaking voice broke the silence, for he gave a hoarse cry of triumph and delight.

"What is more," Mark heard him say, "you were a

witness; you can swear to the police that it went off itself."

Mark rushed down the path, swung round the hedge, and what he saw behind the hedge was burned into his memory for ever.

Brendan Nilan lay at full length on his back on the brown earth, a little streak of blood staining the sods at the back of his head, his ghastly face was contorted, his eyes were open, blank and sightless, his arms were outspread, and in his hands he clutched in a convulsive death grip wet clay that bulged out between the fingers of his tightened fists. A little way above his head stood Dominick, his grotesque figure bent, one powerful hand gripping his cap while with the other he was making the Sign of the Cross.

[THE END.]

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